

EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-883-7150-4

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: DhakaPA@state.gov

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR JAMES F. MORIARTY

PRESS CONFERENCE AT THE DHAKA REPORTERS UNITY (DRU)

DHAKA, MAY 3 -- Following is the text of remarks by Ambassador James F. Moriarty at the press conference at the Dhaka Reporters Unity on May 3, 2009.

(begin text)

Good afternoon. I would like to thank Shamim Ahmad and the members of Dhaka Reporters Unity for inviting me to join you today. It is particularly significant to be here on World Press Freedom Day.

Last month marked the one-year anniversary of my arrival in Bangladesh. I met with many of you shortly after I arrived. At my initial press conference I told you I had arrived in Bangladesh with a great deal of enthusiasm and high hopes for the country's future. I noted that it was a critical time for Bangladesh--a country in transition in a region of the world vital to U.S. interests.

Much progress has taken place in the past year. I continue to have high hopes as Bangladesh transitions back to democracy. I think today's press conference provides a good opportunity to review where we've been, where we are, and where I think we're going.

As you have probably heard, I like to describe U.S.-Bangladesh relations in terms of three D's: democracy, development and denial of space to terrorists. I would like to briefly review the events of the past year through that paradigm.

First, democracy. Last year at this time, the Caretaker Government was working to move Bangladesh toward democratic elections. In the United States, we were unsure who would represent the Democratic Party in the Presidential elections. Today, President Obama is leading my country after making history when he became our first African-American President. His

opponent for party leadership is now the Secretary of State. Here in Bangladesh, the Awami League won a landslide victory in the freest and fairest elections in the country's history. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took office in January, and Parliament is back in session. Parliament immediately passed some key laws, including the separation of the judiciary and the right to information acts.

Second, let's look at development. Last year at this time, inflation approached record levels as Bangladesh recovered from the devastation of Cyclone Sidr. Fuel prices soared, and Bangladeshis hoped a bumper rice crop would address concerns about food security. Today, global commodity prices have fallen considerably. A new fear has crept in, however: the impact of a global economic crisis. Bangladeshis share this global concern and wonder about the prospects of decreasing exports and remittance flows. The Government of Bangladesh recently announced a stimulus package to lessen the effects of the global recession on Bangladesh.

Third, denial of space to terrorists. I wish that I could stand before you to say that the threat of global terrorism has disappeared. There is clearly progress on some fronts, notably the decrease in violence in Iraq. Attacks in India, Pakistan and other countries around the globe, however, demonstrate the world has a long way to go before we are rid of the scourge of terrorism. In Bangladesh, the recent seizure of weapons in Bhola and continued arrests of JMB members throughout the country demonstrate terrorism remains a concern.

So where do we go from here? Let me discuss the future in terms of each D, starting with democracy. Bangladesh witnessed historic, peaceful, democratic elections. There is no question that challenges remain, however. Compromise and bipartisanship are critical to any properly-functioning democracy. There is also a need to strengthen the institutions vital to a healthy democracy.

Parliament will soon reconvene to discuss the country's next budget, which comes at a critical time. The global financial crisis is on the minds of most Bangladeshis and most Americans. In addition, the country has to balance many important, and sometimes competing, priorities. These include the ongoing power crisis, important infrastructure projects as well as funding for agriculture and education. As the issues are serious, so should be the debate. President Obama stated, "The strongest democracies flourish from frequent and lively debate, but they endure when people of every background and belief find a way to set aside smaller differences in service of a greater purpose." No party has a monopoly on good ideas. The

government should provide the opposition with meaningful opportunities to discuss and debate the upcoming budget. The opposition should reach out to the government to look for consensus. Working together, I believe that Bangladesh can respond to the critical needs of all of its citizens, regardless of party affiliation.

It is also important to recognize the role of the media in promoting democracy. Today is World Press Freedom Day. Today we celebrate the importance of a free press to civil society and democracy. A free press is critical to ensure citizens receive the information they need to make knowledgeable decisions and participate in informed dialogue about issues that matter. Freedom and democracy -- the right of people to freely choose their own leaders and hold their governments accountable for the decisions they make -- cannot survive without a free media. As the government and opposition debate the issues important to all Bangladeshis, you have an important responsibility to frame this debate for the people, accurately report the facts, and ensure accountability and transparency.

With regard to development, all eyes remain focused on the global economy. The world currently faces serious economic challenges. Bangladesh is not exempt. The global nature of this crisis makes it critical for nations to work together to find solutions. We understand the increasing importance of trade—and aid—in the U.S.-Bangladesh relationship. The U.S. will provide due consideration to Bangladesh's desire for increased trade. At the same time, the United States is committed to improving the lives of Bangladesh's neediest citizens through our development assistance programs. Just last week I inaugurated the first of many programs aimed at rebuilding areas hit hard by Cyclone Sidr. That project will provide 280,000 agricultural families – more than 1.4 million people - with a new fertilizer technology that uses two-thirds less fertilizer than traditional methods and is more economical and effective .

The third pillar of our bilateral relationship is denial of space to terrorists. The United States continues to work closely with Bangladesh in this area. We have active training programs for law enforcement organizations. This includes training with the Rapid Action Battalion to ensure accountability and respect for human rights. In the wake of the tragic Bangladesh Rifles mutiny, the United States has offered to help Bangladesh reconstitute its border security forces. We were also pleased to act promptly on the government's request for FBI assistance to the investigation into the mutiny. The United States applauds Parliament's passage of the Money Laundering Prevention Ordinance and the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance. Both of these laws give

law enforcement organizations new tools to ensure that terrorists cannot use Bangladesh as a haven.

The United States and Bangladesh have been friends and allies for many years. At last year's press conference I stated, "The United States will work together with Bangladesh to promote democracy, ensure development and deny space to terrorism." That commitment remains in force today.

With that, I am ready to take your questions.

(End text)

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**As prepared for delivery*

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Note: A Bangla translation of this press release is also available at the American Center. If you are interested in the translation, please call the American Center Press Section, Tel: 8837150-4, Fax: 9885688; e-mail: DhakaPA@state.gov; Website: [http:// dhaka.usembassy.gov](http://dhaka.usembassy.gov)