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**REMARKS
BY
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH DAN MOZENA
BANGLADESH DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE
BERKELEY CONFERENCE FOLLOW-UP EVENT
POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, BANANI, DHAKA**

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Dr. Saad Andaleeb, Executive Member of the Bangladesh Development Initiative

Dr. Zaidi Sattar, Chairman of the Policy Research Institute

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... and each of you who, like me, seeks to build ever stronger bridges between America and Bangladesh

Asalaam ‘malaikum and good morning.

No spectacles doth see a more rosy view than those of hindsight, those that look back upon the proverbial “good old days” of yore.

Shakespeare, I’m sure, meant to say something like that.

Certainly, when I look back upon my earlier posting to Bangladesh ... 1998 to June 7, 2001 ... that was a simpler time for America’s relationship with Bangladesh, which then was a place that people like me loved, but, to be frank, America’s strategic focus was elsewhere.

All of that changed with the events of September 11, 2001.

After 9/11 Bangladesh came to loom large on the scope of America’s strategic interests. To recount briefly from my presentation at Berkeley, in the post-9/11 world -- from America’s perspective -- Bangladesh is a moderate, secular, tolerant, democratic alternative to violent extremism; it promotes stability in the region by deepening ties with its neighbors; it supports global peace as the largest contributor of forces to international peacekeeping; Bangladesh is important, too, to America’s pursuit of global food security, greater trade and investment,

deepened respect for democracy and human rights, and expanded protection of the people from cyclones, floods and earthquakes.

In short, Bangladesh, the world's seventh largest country and the world's third largest Muslim majority country, matters to America; Bangladesh is of strategic importance to America.

Reflecting that reality, America's relationship with Bangladesh today is stronger, deeper, broader than ever before. America is Bangladesh's single largest market; America is the largest investor in Bangladesh; America is the third largest source of remittances to Bangladesh; America is Bangladesh's second largest bilateral development partner. Only Bangladesh is a partner in all four of President Obama's signature global initiatives: Global Health, Feed the Future, Global Climate Change, and Engagement with the global Muslim community.

At Berkeley, I detailed the achievements of this rich partnership in improving the lives and well-being of the Bangladeshi people to the benefit of both Bangladesh and America, so I will not repeat that other than to remind you that this partnership – America and Bangladesh – has yielded tangible results in reducing child and maternal mortality, allowing Bangladeshis to have the family size they want, increasing food security, adapting to the effects of climate change, shifting the mentality of the police, countering violent extremism, strengthening democratic institutions, securing sea and land borders, and the list goes on.

During my remarks at Berkeley, I spoke of America's concerns about labor rights and work place safety in the aftermath of the terrible fire at Tazreen Fashions last November. Of course, since Berkeley much has happened in terms of worker safety in the RMG sector. In April, Rana Plaza collapsed, killing 1129, maiming hundreds and destroying thousands of families. This tragedy was no accident; it was the handiwork of greed and corruption. And today the issues of workers' rights loom hugely in America's relationship with Bangladesh.

On June 27, President Obama announced his decision to suspend Bangladesh's designation as a GSP beneficiary developing country because it has not taken or is not taking steps to afford internationally recognized worker right to workers in the country.

My mother always said the dark clouds of life often have silver linings. I believe that the dark, dark clouds of the tragedies of Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza may have a silver lining. I believe these horrible incidents may prove to be the clarion call for deep, fundamental change of the apparel sector in Bangladesh, change that will address the serious labor rights and work place safety issues that challenge the sector, change that will ensure that there are never again

any more Tazreen Fashion fires or Rana Plaza building collapses, change that will bring the apparel sector to global standards, change that will make Bangladesh a preferred brand, not a pariah brand, in the global marketplace.

The international community, including America, is engaging in a manner without precedent to help effect this needed “deep, fundamental change” in the Bangladesh apparel sector to help Bangladesh ensure that there will be no more Tazreen Fashions fires or Rana Plaza building collapses.

On July 8, the EU and Government of Bangladesh, in association with the International Labor Organization, adopted a Compact to ensure the sustainability of the Bangladesh apparel sector through continuing improvements in labor rights and factory safety.

On July 19 America announced its association with the Compact. We look forward to working as a full partner with the EU, Bangladesh, and the ILO to implement the goals of the Compact.

On the same day, America released the GSP Action Plan, which lays out a road map for Bangladesh to regain its GSP privileges. Many of the steps identified in the Action Plan align closely with the commitments laid out in the Compact, though the Action Plan does require some additional concrete actions to protect labor activists and to promote safe working conditions in the shrimp processing industry.

Buyers, too, have joined the global campaign to help Bangladesh effect lasting change in the apparel sector. In America, seventeen brands, including WalMart, the Gap, Target and other major buyers announced on July 10 the creation of the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety and on May 13 mostly European but also a few important American brands announced the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, which is now up to more than 80 buyers. These engagements commit the buyers to source only from safe factories and to help factories with safety shortcomings to redress those deficiencies.

Of course, the Government of Bangladesh is the key to effecting change to the sector. On July 15, the Bangladesh parliament passed legislation amending the Bangladesh Labor Law. Despite some identified shortcomings, the amendments facilitate workers’ rights to associate and organize and thus contribute to an environment that I hope will enable the ILO to launch a Better Work program soon.

The ILO is seeking to undertake a major initiative that would enable the ILO and Bangladesh government to work together to develop mechanisms for bringing all the various initiatives to address safety and labor issues into a cogent, uniform undertaking that would ensure that all/all RMG and knitwear factories are brought up to safety and labor rights standards.

America and other friends of Bangladesh are funding various undertakings to address specific concerns in the RMG sector.

Meanwhile, I am already engaging with the Government of Bangladesh on how best to proceed in addressing the points raised in the GSP Action Plan so Bangladesh can again qualify for GSP privileges.

The bottom line is that strong, dynamic, profitable RMG and knitwear industries, where workers are fairly compensated and fairly treated and where working conditions are safe, are the driving force in realizing a Bangladesh where all have the means to provide their families safe, secure housing, ample, nutritious food, good healthcare and quality education.

I hope this detailed update of America's engagement on labor rights and work place safety in the Bangladesh apparel sector is useful in painting a current picture of the America-Bangladesh partnership.

I believe the Bangladeshi-American diaspora has an important role to play in bolstering this partnership. Certainly, engaging this diaspora in fostering the bilateral relationship is one of my priority objectives as I continue to reach out to and engage Bangladeshi-Americans across America from New York and Washington to Portland, Oregon, Silicon Valley and Los Angeles. My next stops will be in Michigan and Texas. Of course, BDI shares my conviction that the Bangladesh diaspora in America has much to offer in fostering improved bilateral linkages.

We here at U.S. Mission Dhaka are committed to further engaging the Bangladeshi American diaspora in America's partnership with Bangladesh.

We are in the final phases of creating and testing a new online facility called **LiftBangla**, which is a philanthropy portal that will connect diaspora with vetted charity organizations in Bangladesh. A recurring thread in all my engagements with the Bangladeshi-American community has been the need for members of the diaspora to have some means to give back to Bangladesh with confidence that the donations would be used to good effect. I believe

LiftBangla will enable Bangladeshi-Americans to donate to Bangladesh with confidence that their contributions will be used as intended.

In addition, in an effort to promote greater entrepreneurship in Bangladesh, our new Edward M. Kennedy Center for Public Service and the Arts is preparing to launch later this summer **the Entrepreneurship Initiative**, an innovative social business development program that will develop rich, professional connections between young, local entrepreneurs and Bangladeshi American mentors.

The EMK Entrepreneurship Initiative will focus on four projects:

- 1) It will create a research cell to identify Bangladeshi American diaspora who can help improve Bangladeshi industries; create an online platform to connect Bangladeshis and the diaspora; and lead nationwide diaspora mentoring programs that use virtual platforms to connect local businessmen and women with U.S.-based diaspora.
- 2) Working with a group of inspired young Bangladeshi entrepreneurs, the Initiative will create an entrepreneurial development program that will identify startups from every industry, train them, and give them access to seed funding to take their businesses to the next level.
- 3) A third project will empower underprivileged women by training them to design and produce designer clothes and accessories. The products will be sold in the U.S. through a Bangladeshi expatriate.
- 4) And finally, the Initiative will provide bright young minds, with a focus on ensuring female participation, with the mentorship, funding, and infrastructure support they need to bring their ideas to fruition. Furthermore, the project will create a strong and sustainable infrastructure supporting the tech startup community in Bangladesh.

I am quite excited about this Entrepreneurship Initiative, which I hope will identify, develop and encourage Bangladesh's next generation of businessmen and women.

The success of both LiftBangla and this new Entrepreneurship Initiative is dependent upon the Bangladeshi American diaspora, which includes the brightest, most energetic, most innovative entrepreneurs, academics, and professionals from across the professional spectrum.

I believe the diaspora – innovators, businessmen, professionals, academics, entrepreneurs -- can best educate, train, inspire Bangladesh's emerging entrepreneurs.

I believe that Bangladeshi Americans are and will continue to be a powerful force in helping Bangladesh realize its aspirations.

I believe that groups like BDI can play key roles in linking and relinking Bangladeshi-Americans to Bangladesh. By mentoring innovative and creative young Bangladeshis, you inspire and focus their ideas. You can encourage them to explore possibilities offered by the Entrepreneurship Initiative. And you can stay connected. Your initiative in organizing today's event is only the latest example of your continuing efforts to promote deepened engagement between the Bangladeshi-American diaspora and Bangladesh.

I applaud and support these good efforts, and commit myself and my mission to continue to work with you toward our shared objective of building ever bigger, broader, stronger people-to-people bridges between America and Bangladesh. Our success in this endeavor is to the mutual benefit of the people of America and Bangladesh.

Thank you.

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**As prepared for delivery*