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**REMARKS BY
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH DAN MOZENA
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS FORUM BANGLADESH
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
SONARGOAN HOTEL, DHAKA
MARCH 23, 2013**

Hafizur Rahman Khan, President, IBFB

Mahmudul Islam Chowdhury, Founder and former President, IBFB

Dr. Mizanur Rahman, Chairman, Human Rights Commission

IBFB Board of Directors, IBFB members, friends

Asalaam 'malaikum and good afternoon

I wish to begin by acknowledging with deep personal sadness the death on Wednesday of President Zillur Rahman. Bangladesh truly lost a hero and friend ... a great guardian of the nation ... a grateful nation will long remember President Rahman's rich legacy; my wife Grace and I will long remember President Rahman's caring for our personal well-being as we settled into life here in Bangladesh. Like all the citizens of this wonderful nation, I will greatly miss President Zillur Rahman.

Some of you may recall that a year ago I had the good fortune to address your Annual General Meeting. I am so pleased that you saw fit to invite me back!

Last year I detailed for you my vision of Bangladesh as the next Asian Tiger. Today, I believe more deeply than ever that Bangladesh can be/should be the next Asian Tiger, the Royal Bengal Tiger. My continuing trips across Bangladesh from Tetulia to Teknaf, from Sylhet to Satkhira reinforce my contention that Bangladesh, the Royal Bengal Tiger, is well poised to strut across the global economic stage, reflecting economic power commensurate with its size as the world's seventh largest country. Most recently, I was in Jessore and Satkhira, where I learned about Bangladesh's great potential to grow and export flowers to the Middle East and to expand exports of clay tiles to Italy. Everywhere I go in Bangladesh, I see some new aspect

Bangladesh's potential to become an Asian Tiger. There is much I could add, but I think I will let this brief update of my presentation last year suffice.

I recently returned from a three week trip to the United States ... little play, almost all work, including a two-day conference on Bangladesh at the University of California-Berkeley, extensive outreach to the Bangladeshi-American community in Silicon Valley, comprehensive consultations in Washington, another two-day conference at the Pacific Command in Hawaii, and consultations at Pacific Command. It was a jammed schedule, but it was most gratifying.

Everywhere I went ... California, Washington, Hawaii ... the buzz was the same: Wow ... Bangladesh ... Bangladesh really matters ... and often I would see my own words coming back at me, explaining that Bangladesh, the world's seventh largest country and home to its fourth largest Muslim population, is a moderate, tolerant, democratic alternative to violent extremism and that it is America's good partner in fighting terrorism and violent extremism. Others spoke of Bangladesh's role as a good neighbor in the region and how Bangladesh's improving ties with its neighbors brings greater stability to this troubled region.

Still others reminded me that Bangladesh helps keep the peace all over the world through its contributions to international peacekeeping, something that all of you know well, something that America, too, deeply appreciates. Some of the people I met told me of Bangladesh's critical role in achieving global food security, an obvious point since food security is not possible unless the world's seventh largest country can feed itself.

Everywhere I went, the talk was the same: Bangladesh matters; Bangladesh matters to America. Our trade people spoke of America's growing trade and investment in Bangladesh; our human rights people spoke of the opportunities, progress and challenges in promoting democracy and respect for human rights; those engaged in the world of natural disasters spoke approvingly of the America-Bangladesh partnership's success in building cyclone shelters; with greater concern, these disaster experts spoke of the challenges of preparing for a major earthquake in this seismically active zone.

I share all of this to make simple, but critical points: America increasingly understands that Bangladesh is crucially important to building and sustaining global and regional peace, stability, prosperity and security; America increasingly understands that Bangladesh is a country of deep strategic interest to America.

These themes wove through all of my engagements in America during my three week visit. Truly, Bangladesh matters to America.

Before traveling to America, I had the good fortune to share dinner with Foreign Minister Dipu Moni. We had not even begun to nibble on the appetizer, when the honorable minister remarked that the relationship between America and Bangladesh was better, stronger than ever. I agreed, noting my view that this partnership had never in history been broader, deeper, stronger than it is right now.

My just-concluded trip made clear that America concurs; this partnership is strong and awesome.

America is Bangladesh's largest market; America is the largest investor in Bangladesh; an American company is the largest taxpayer 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.

Bangladesh is truly a great partner. Working together, America and Bangladesh have already achieved so much to improve the well-being of the people of Bangladesh, which, of course, is in America's interests, too.

The partnership has helped reduce maternal mortality, placing Bangladesh on track to achieve this Millennium Development Goal.

The partnership has helped reduce child under-five mortality, again enabling Bangladesh to soon achieve its Millennium Development Goal.

Thanks to the partnership, Bangladeshis are now better able to have the family size they want, thus helping the government of Bangladesh meet its goal of reducing the fertility rate to replacement levels.

The partnership is helping Bangladesh achieve food security by enabling farmers to increase food production, by enabling Bangladeshis to develop the means to procure food for the family, and by teaching mothers how to select and prepare varied, nutritious food for the family.

The partnership helps Bangladesh adapt to the effects of global climate change, which will have a heavy impact on Bangladesh. The partnership is heavily engaged in disaster

preparedness. Already America in partnership with Bangladesh has built or rebuilt nearly 550 cyclone shelters and is now in the process of building 130 more. Two weeks ago the Home Minister and I opened the first of thirty Coastal Crisis Management Centers, which are specialized cyclone shelters that will be permanently manned by the Bangladesh Coast Guard and that will play critical roles in expediting response to natural disasters and in enhancing maritime security.

With Bangladesh increasingly well prepared to deal with cyclones, floods and tidal surges, the partnership has shifted focus to earthquake preparedness. I am working now to help Bangladesh establish a Regional Disaster Management Center.

The partnership continues to strengthen Bangladesh's emerging democratic institutions by helping parliament bolster its committees so they can provide more effective oversight, by improving investigative journalism, and by increasing the capacity of governance at the upazilla and union parishad levels. Just last week I joined the Prime Minister in opening an international conference, co-sponsored by America and Denmark, to strengthen local government.

The partnership is playing a key role in helping the Bangladesh Police instill a new philosophy of policing, replacing the lathi approach with community-based policing. At any given time, there are three policemen from the Portland Police Department at the Bangladesh Police Academy in Sardah, sharing their experiences in regard to community-based policing.

Our military-to-military partnership is especially strong and productive. Working together, America and Bangladesh have strengthened Bangladesh's ability to secure its maritime borders from piracy, terrorism, trafficking of people, drugs, and arms ... Bangladesh can now better protect its fish and other resources in the Bay of Bengal. This partnership has helped Bangladesh create a Navy Seals-like capacity, called SWADS, that is most impressive.

Thanks to the enhanced capabilities of the Bangladesh Coast Guard and Navy, robberies of ships at anchorage in Chittagong have fallen by nearly 75% and insurance rates have dropped by nearly a third. Our engagement with the Bangladesh Navy and Coast Guard has included the transfer of dozens of high speed, high performance boats. When I was in California, I visited the USCG cutter Jarvis, which will become the largest ship in the Bangladesh Navy by year's end. I also hope to transfer four C-130H's within a year to help Bangladesh expand its ability to respond to disasters and to support international peacekeeping operations.

There's more: the system of Smiling Sun health clinics the partnership supports, the teaching of English and other basic skills in madrassas, the Sisimpur program for pre-school age children, expanded scholarships so more Bangladeshis can get Master's and PhD degrees in America, our exciting new Edward M. Kennedy Center for Public Service and the Arts developed with the Liberation War Museum right in the heart of Dhaka's university community, our support of young social entrepreneurs active in various civil society initiatives, and so much more ... but I must move on.

America and Bangladesh are not content with these accomplishments. We seek to take this partnership to an even higher plane. During her visit to Bangladesh last May, then Secretary of State Clinton and Foreign Minister Moni signed an agreement that established the Partnership Dialogue to institutionalize this partnership and to give it strategic direction.

The first Partnership Dialogue took place last September in Washington; and we and our Bangladeshi partners are now busily preparing for the next Dialogue, which is slated for Dhaka in late May. We expect this engagement will be even more successful than the first in deepening, broadening and strengthening the relationship.

A rapidly growing frontier in the relationship deals with energy. A delegation of American energy experts just wrapped up an intensive week-long visit during which they and their Bangladeshi counterparts explored how best to tap Bangladesh's significant natural energy reserves and to develop renewable energy sources. The visiting Energy Delegation announced U.S. support for Bangladesh as a focus country for the UN/World Bank Sustainable Energy for All initiative.

Of course, even the best marriage has its challenges, and so it is with bilateral partnerships, even ones as strong as that between America and Bangladesh.

One issue relates to ensuring Bangladeshi workers' labor rights and safe working conditions. In a few days there will be a hearing in Washington on a petition filed by the American labor organization AFL-CIO to remove Bangladesh's trade privileges under the Generalized System of Preferences due to inadequate workers' protection in the RMG and shrimp sectors. The issues raised in the petition are real and serious: constraints on workers' ability to freely associate, harassment of labor organizers, refusal to register legitimate unions, firings of those seeking to create unions, unsafe working conditions, among others. Bangladesh government and owners are endeavoring to address these concerns so they work to build a strong

case for why these privileges should not be removed. In a moment, I will mention how you can help on this front.

Loss of GSP privileges would send a strong, negative message to the marketplace around the world. Also, loss of GSP could disqualify Bangladesh from Duty Free/Quota Free access to the American market should the WTO succeed, as many expect, to provide such access to LDC's in the next two to three years. If Bangladesh's GSP privileges are removed, I fear getting them restored would be a lengthy and arduous process. The ultimate irony would be the WTO's deciding to provide LDC's DFQF, but Bangladesh would not be able to reap this benefit in the American market for want of GSP privileges.

I believe that you, the members of IBFB, both individually and collectively, can make a difference in improving workers' rights and workplace safety. Your advocacy and collective action can help move Bangladeshi industry towards compliance with international labor standards. These are more than just idealistic goals. Data from countries around the world indicate that when labor standards improve, when workers receive fair pay, when safety and working conditions are improved, everyone benefits – both workers and owners, resulting in increased worker satisfaction, increased productivity, increased profits, increased export competitiveness. Each of you can help lead the way by improving labor standards and working conditions in your respective companies and factories ... you will be doing something good for Bangladesh, and something good for your bottom line.

Another burr under the saddle relates to the welfare of Rohingya refugees. During a visit to Bangladesh two weeks ago, the U.S. Special Representative for Burma underscored that the solution to the Rohingya issue lies in Burma, which must deal constructively with the question of citizenship for the Rohingya. Thanking Bangladesh for accommodating hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees, the Special Representative hoped that Bangladesh would endeavor to ensure that those Rohingya refugees receive basic humanitarian assistance as they cope with their difficult living situation.

We also encourage the government to ensure the continued effectiveness, integrity and unique governance structure of Grameen Bank, which brings hope for a brighter future to over 8 million vulnerable Bangladeshis, mostly women.

I think 2013 will be key to Bangladesh's realizing the vision of becoming the next Asian Tiger, the Royal Bengal Tiger.

Progress on labor rights, retention of GSP, and an ILO Better Work project could set the stage for explosive economic growth and greater opportunity for all Bangladeshis.

An immediate cessation of political violence and early agreement among the political parties on a way forward to hold free, fair and credible elections would help greatly in attracting investment dollars from China and elsewhere to come to Bangladesh.

I hope, I pray that Bangladesh will undertake to realize its vision of a Middle-Income Bangladesh, Sonar Bangla, where all Bangladeshis have the means to provide their families safe housing, ample, nutritious food, quality education, and good healthcare. Sonar Bangla is no vacant dream; it is a vision waiting to become reality when and if you choose, when and if Bangladesh chooses to make it reality.

Thank you.

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**As prepared for delivery*