

EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-8855500

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: DhakaPA@state.gov

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



**REMARKS
BY
U.S. AMBASSADOR DAN MOZENA
BANGABANDHU SHEIKH MUJIB MEDICAL UNIVERSITY
DHAKA
AUGUST 28, 2013**

Vice Chancellor Pran Gopal Datta

Pro-Vice Chancellor Prof. Md. Shahidullah

... and all of you who are the champions in Bangladesh's ongoing successful battle to bring better health to the magnificent people of this great nation.

Asalaam 'malaikum and good morning

Thank you greatly for the instructive introduction this morning to the good work being done here at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, Bangladesh's premier medical institution. I am so grateful that the Vice Chancellor invited me to come today.

A number is an abstract concept ... it should not evoke emotion.

I know that, but I cannot help myself.

21,500 ...

... that is a big number ...

... that is a horrible number ...

... I do not like that number.

In October I will be grandpa for the first time, so this number ... 21,500 ... is particularly heart wrenching to me.

... 21,500 ...

... that is the number of newborn Bangladeshi babies who will die this year from oxygen deprivation or asphyxia.

You can see why I do not like that number ...

... nobody likes that number.

Bangladesh is determined to slash that number. After all, asphyxia is the second leading cause of neonatal death.

Preventing asphyxia at birth is a key component of Bangladesh's impressive Action Plan to End Preventable Child Deaths by 2035. What a wonderful goal!

Of course, having a goal and achieving a goal are two different things. That's where this you come in, that's where this wondrous institution comes in. This university ... Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University ... is showing the way to save lives of newborns during that critical first minute ... the golden minute ... of life. This university ... you ... has directly and indirectly trained over 17,000 birth attendants and health service providers at private and public health facilities across the nation on the use of a simple, innovative, yet most effective, bag and mask device that resuscitates babies who are experiencing breathing difficulties at birth.

Of course, we cannot rest on our laurels ... we must push on ... our goal is to train more than 25,000 service providers in this innovative technique.

I am pleased and proud that America is Bangladesh's great partner in helping Bangladeshi newborns take their first breath ... literally. This grand medical center is a partner with America, UNICEF and other friends of Bangladesh in the Helping Babies Breathe initiative. This dynamic, innovative public-private partnership brings good hope that Bangladesh can greatly reduce or even eliminate birth asphyxia, the cause of about 20% of newborn deaths in Bangladesh. Imagine that ... one simple intervention can have such a dramatic impact. You must be so proud of the leadership role that this institution plays in giving life to the next generation of Bangladeshis.

I learned so much during my tour this morning. Aside from visiting the Helping Babies Breathe Center, I saw the impressive Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and learned about the university's efforts to develop and train staff for similar, albeit less sophisticated, facilities throughout Bangladesh, right down to the union parishad level. Since 60 percent of current child-under-five mortality occurs during the first 28 days of life, such facilities are essential to further cutting child mortality. America will be supporting the development of such newborn care corners in new health programs that are coming online.

I was also impressed by my visit to the Center for Neurodevelopment and Autism in Children. The visit reminded me of my recent meeting at my home with the Prime Minister's daughter Putul, who has done so much to focus public and government attention on the challenges of autism in Bangladesh.

I close as I began by acknowledging the wonderful work of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University in bringing good health to the people of Bangladesh, especially the newborns. Of course, when I speak of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, I speak not of some abstract entity or of great piles of bricks and mortar, since bricks and mortar are inert objects that in and of themselves achieve nothing. No, when I speak of the wonders of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, I speak of you ... of you, the doctors, nurses, technicians, public health practitioners, the administrators, the range of professional and support staff ... you are the champions of Bangladesh's health revolution, a revolution that is accomplishing the unimaginable in slashing child mortality and maternal mortality and in enabling Bangladeshis to have the family size they want. These are achievements of a global dimension ... Bangladesh must be so proud; you must be so proud.

I am proud that America has been Bangladesh's steadfast partner on all of these fronts, and I commit my mission and my government to remain at Bangladesh's side as the battle for good health for all Bangladeshis rages on.

Thank you.

=====

**As prepared for delivery.*