

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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## AMBASSADOR DAN MOZENA PRESS CONFERENCE

**Dhaka, Bangladesh**

**March 31, 2014**

**Ambassador Mozena:** Good afternoon everybody. And thank you for coming. I just came back, I said I came back yesterday, but no, I came back Saturday. My goodness, I was gone for over three weeks and it was a wonderful trip. First I went to Iowa to see my 93 year old mother who's doing very well and who says greetings to all of you. She's thinking about you.

**Press:** Please give our greetings to your mother.

**Ambassador Mozena:** Thank you, I shall do that. It's very kind of you to say that. You notice everybody else was dead silent, so I will tell her that everyone else said nothing nice to her.

**Press:** I was speaking for everyone here.

**Ambassador Mozena:** Okay, everybody's off the hook.

I went to Iowa first, then I went to Washington. Secretary Kerry hosted a two-day Global Chiefs of Mission Conference where he had all of his Ambassadors come and then Nisha Biswal, my immediate boss, the Assistant Secretary of State for Central and South Asian Affairs, had a conference. Then I did consultations in Washington. Then I started globetrotting, nation trotting I should say, to reach out to Bangladeshi-American communities.

First I went to New York City. I was accompanied by Congresswoman Grace Meng. And oh my goodness, we had so much fun. We went to Queens, we went to Jackson Heights, we actually walked down the streets of what they call Little Dhaka. So we visited there.

From there I flew to Texas. I went first to Houston, which is the fourth largest city in America. There I was with Congressman Pete Olson. I reached out to all of the Bangladeshi-Americans there. So many different kinds of events. Then I went to San Antonio, I went to Austin. This is all in Texas. Then to Dallas. In Dallas I was joined by Congressman Pete Sessions.

From there I flew to San Jose. San Jose is in California. That's Silicon Valley. I had a program with Bangladeshi-Americans there. That program was organized by my son, named Mark, who graduated from high school here. So you see the world is very small. I was accompanied there by Congressman Honda.

From there -- That ended all my official program. I went to Oceanside, way down in San Diego, and spent a couple of days there with my wife and daughter and my granddaughter and my son-in-law. So that was my program.

A couple of things came out from the Chiefs of Mission conference. One is the heavy focus that America has under Secretary Kerry on environment issues, on climate change issues. These were issues that the Secretary spoke of in depth and with deep passion.

He talked a lot about trade and economic policy and the importance of economic policy in pursuing foreign policy. Of course in that context I and others talked about the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor which looms huge, at least in my eyes, in the development of Bangladesh. The Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor links Central Asia, South Asia, with China, with Singapore, and with the world. And of course in the middle of all of that, you know as well as I do, is Bangladesh. And the Bangladesh of my vision would be a huge, huge contributor to the flow of trade coursing through the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor. So that was an issue that loomed very large.

Also I had many discussions relating to America's relationship with Bangladesh; my continuing mandate to broaden, to deepen, to strengthen that partnership to the benefit of both nations.

We talked a lot about GSP, the Generalized System of Preferences. As you all know last June, June 27<sup>th</sup>, Bangladesh's participation was suspended. The next review is coming up, so we talked about that. I talked about my aspiration for restoration of that benefit as Bangladesh transforms the ready-made garment sector into a sector that is truly an international standard in terms of fire safety, in terms of factory structural soundness, in terms of respect for workers' rights to freely associate and organize. So you can imagine a lot of focus on that.

Focus on countering violent extremism. Focus on America's security partnership.

I spent a lot of time interacting with Capitol Hill. That's where the Senate and the House of Representatives are.

On my trip I mentioned that I was accompanied at four different times by four different Congressional representatives. I detailed that because I want you to understand that a major part of my engagement is reaching out to Capitol Hill, to help Capitol Hill, members of Congress better understand Bangladesh. To better understand Bangladesh beyond the newspaper headlines, but to understand the Bangladesh that I know and the Bangladesh that is of deep strategic interest to America.

So that's why I took full advantage of the time with those congressmen to help them understand Bangladesh.

I also went up to Capitol Hill and met with all of the key staff. I don't know, maybe a couple of dozen staff members focused on Bangladesh and we spoke a lot about the labor situation in Bangladesh.

So those are all the kinds of things that I did.

Looking ahead, I see some very busy weeks ahead. I see that later this month we will have the Third Annual Security Dialogue that will be here in Dhaka. At the end of the month we will have the very first ever TICFA bilateral exchange. This is very important. As you know, TICFA was signed last November and went into effect in February of this year. What it is, it establishes the bilateral forum with representatives from Bangladesh and from America to come together and to identify obstacles to increasing trade and investment and how to overcome those obstacles. So we're having the first ever of those later this month.

In the summer, June-ish or so, will be the Third Annual Partnership Dialogue. You recall that in May of 2012 then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton came and with the Government of Bangladesh concluded this agreement. So we will have the third session of that.

Later in the fall we'll have the third session of the Bilateral Military Dialogue. This is a nuts and bolts exchange identifying the various exercises coming up and things like that.

I would like to go back a little bit and talk about the message I conveyed in America to the Bangladesh-American community. Basically it's a four part message.

First of all, I just gave an update on how America sees the situation. But of course everybody there is following it regularly. But my message to Bangladesh-Americans is that they have an important part to play in building, in strengthening, in bolstering the partnership between America and Bangladesh.

You know there are about half a million Bangladeshi-Americans. They are amazingly successful and they're very interested in strengthening this partnership between the two countries. I suggest they can do four different things.

One is to invest in Bangladesh. Look, Bangladeshi-Americans, I just said, they've done well. I have to Google, I think they will be among the most successful immigrant groups in the United States. I'll have to Google that. That's just my observation. So they've done well. They have the ability to invest back in Bangladesh. I encourage them to invest in Bangladesh. There are

many areas for potential investment. And most especially I encourage them to consider going into the world of IT.

At one point when I was in California I went to Facebook headquarters. An unbelievable, exciting place. There's just so much happening there. I met with a group of I think about 30 Bangladeshi-American, all young people, all IT wonks. They're very excited about this partnership with Bangladesh. So that's one area for Bangladeshi-Americans to engage. Investment in IT.

A second area is through mentoring. Bangladeshi-Americans have learned a lot, sometimes the hard way, but they have a lot of expertise, they have a lot of know-how, they have a lot of problem-solving ability, they have a lot of connections, they have resources, they have networks, they know how to market. So I think Bangladeshi-Americans would be natural mentors to up and coming Bangladeshi entrepreneurs.

We have established at the Edward M. Kennedy Center for Public Service and the Arts, the EMK Center, an enterprise, and you know this, called the Entrepreneurship Initiative. This is a mechanism that will help us create these linkages between budding Bangladeshi entrepreneurs and Bangladeshi-American mentors. So that's the second area. Mentoring.

The third area is through giving. A lot of people in America, especially Bangladeshi-Americans want to give back to Bangladesh, but they're not sure how to do it in a way that their money doesn't sort of get eaten up along the way. But we have created something called LiftBangla.org, you can Google that. It's a mechanism by which people can contribute, can donate, get a U.S. tax deduction, and donate to a vetted cause in Bangladesh. We have about ten different entities that we, the U.S. Embassy, have worked with and have vetted as responsible causes. Those who donate through this portal will receive a report about how their money was used. So a lot of interest everywhere I went, a lot of interest in both the mentoring initiative and in the LiftBangla.org initiative.

The fourth way is through building people-to-people ties. People going back and forth, encouraging Bangladeshis to study in America. I think many of you know my goal is to increase the number to 33,480. That's my goal. I want 33,480 Bangladeshis studying in America. Two years ago it was 3,348. That's ridiculous. So we want to multiply it by a factor of ten. So I encourage Bangladeshi-Americans to encourage all of their friends and relatives to look into studying in America.

I also shared with these groups that Bangladesh matters to America and I explained why Bangladesh matters to America. I shared with them about my vision, and you've all heard this before, about Bangladesh as Asia's next tiger. I developed all of that, and how they can participate in that.

That's it. It was an incredibly exhausting tour. I must say I never run out of energy, but about six straight nights of three hours' sleep I was feeling a little tired, and the poor guy traveling with me, I wasn't sure if we should go to the funeral home or what. It was a tough but very very exciting trip.

Anyway, I'm glad to be home. Now I'm back and I'll open it up for questions.

**Press:** This is Zahirul Alam. I work for *NTV*.

Ambassador, so many events are coming up you have already mentioned, and you had consultation with the government, Congress, diaspora, and other stakeholders in America interested about Bangladesh.

Apart from partnership dialogue, dialogue on TICFA, and other issues, what are the most other important areas which can deepen relations between Bangladesh? And in the eyes of Capitol Hill or the government what are the biggest impediments standing against the development of Bangladesh given the current situation? There has been a lot of concern about the democratic process, the function of parliament and about the ongoing elections. So what are the concerns and what are the issues that really think about Bangladesh right now?

**Ambassador Mozena:** I can't accept the way you opened your question. You can't dismiss the Security Dialogue, the Partnership Dialogue, the TICFA and the military bilateral dialogue. That's what it's all about. That's the story. Those are the four key engines of engagement.

So if the question is how are we going to engage to deepen, to broaden, to strengthen our partnership, that's the answer. You threw the answer out with the question. You can't do that. That's the answer. Through those four mechanisms which will be coming up in the next, well, starting in a couple of weeks and the next few months. This is very important.

The questions back home related, a lot of questions related to Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions fire. I shared with them my conviction that -- not guarantee. This is my belief. That Bangladesh is on a path to ensure that there will never again be another Rana Plaza, never again another Tazreen Fashion fire. And the mechanism for that is what is called the 3+5 process. Many of you know what that is. That's where you have the three key government of Bangladesh Secretaries -- Commerce, Labor, Foreign Affairs -- engaging with five involved Ambassadors including myself. I wear the GSP restoration hat; I wear the hat of the sustainability compact; I wear the hat of America's being the single largest country market. So there's *moi*, I'm one Ambassador. There's the EU Ambassador who wears the sustainability compact hat; and the EU collectively is the largest market for Bangladeshi ready-made garment exports. Sixty percent. Twenty-five percent goes to America. Then you have the Dutch Ambassador who is there not in a bilateral capacity, but he's chairman of the local consultative group for private sector development, so he's representing all the donors. You have the Canadians because they're a major contributor to the ILO program. Then you have the fifth Ambassador is a rotating ambassadorship among the EU members.

These five Ambassadors, these three Secretaries, get together once a month and we drive the transformation process forward using the GSP restoration road map and the sustainability compact. Those two documents are the road map for transformation. And important progress has been made and much more progress needs to be done.

So people asked about that. You ask me what do people ask about, that's what they asked about. I gave a very comprehensive response, about a ten minute response about how so many stars are lining up in such a way that bode well for transformation of the sector. It's not guaranteed. I don't know. At the end of the day it might not happen. But I pray, and I will work to the day I get on the airplane to leave to help Bangladesh make this happen.

So people talked a lot about that. That was a major area. Because you know the Rana Plaza anniversary is coming up on April 24<sup>th</sup>.

People talked about the political situation in Bangladesh and I made reference to the January 6<sup>th</sup> statement that was issued by the Department of State. I made reference to Assistant Secretary of State Nisha Biswal's testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on February 11<sup>th</sup>. They're two very comprehensive statements, and that's U.S. policy. I underscored the need that there not be violence as well. I underscored the need for political space. I underscored the need for all parties to use political space responsibly and peacefully. So we had that discussion.

A lot discussion about trade and the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor. So those are the kinds of issues.

I think from my perspective though, and this is probably a point you might not be able to appreciate, is to change the narrative of Bangladesh. Because you pick up the *Wall Street Journal*, you pick up the *Washington Post*, you pick up the *New York Times*, you go to CNN, and for months and months it's been stories about Rana Plaza and stories about natural disasters, and all these things. But that's not the story of Bangladesh. So I took it, every time I go home I do the same thing. As I reach out, reach out, reach out, is to change the narrative so people don't forget that Bangladesh is a very important country. It is the 7<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world. It is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest Muslim majority country in the world. It is a strong partner in countering violent extremism. It is a country of stability in a trouble region. It is a major, perhaps the major contributor of forces for global peacekeeping. It is important for global food security. You've heard me say these things. All these things. That's what I'm telling the Americans because they don't necessarily understand that. They just see pictures of Rana Plaza.

Rana Plaza is not the whole story. That's my message. Rana Plaza is not the whole story.

**Press:** (Shamim Ahmed from the *New Age*) Thank you Ambassador for your lengthy reply, whole lot of things. I just want to know perhaps last month when there was a senate hearing on Bangladesh. You met with Khaleda Zia and after meeting with Khaleda, you told reporters that you haven't full business like interaction with the new government, Sheikh Hasina's government, quoting your Nisha Biswal I think, and you haven't yet congratulated Sheikh Hasina like other countries did. So with this I still want to know what your relation with the new government apart from working relation. What's the full-fledged interaction or business-like interaction?

**Ambassador Mozena:** I've spoken to that. Our policy is very clearly stated and you can Google it as easily as I can recite it. Look at January 6<sup>th</sup>, look at February 11<sup>th</sup>. We even had, DAS Atul Keshap came out here at the end of last month and he also repeated our statement. So it's perfectly clear.

That's our statement. At the same time we made very clear that our support for the people of Bangladesh remains totally undiminished and therefore we remain, our partnership remains unchanged in so many areas, and we are working ahead. I'm very pleased with the continuing progress of that partnership.

In the last few months we have signed an Open Skies Agreement. We have signed an MOU for cooperation to counter terrorism. The Open Skies I think was August; the counter terrorism MOU was October. We did a drug enforcement and transnational crime agreement in December. We did TICFA, that was signed in November. So these are all steps that show the deepening, broadening and strengthening partnership between our two countries, so that's our policy. We will continue to do that.

**Press:** (Shamim Ahmed, *The New Age*) follow-up: But what is your relation? I want to know your specific position?

**Ambassador Mozena:** That's my answer.

**Press:** (Shamim Ahmed, *The New Age*) You said about the people but what about the relation with the government?

**Ambassador Mozena:** I answered it.

**Press:** Thank you, I am Imran Alam from *Naya Diganta*.

I think you have kept an eye regarding the incidents for local government election going on here in Bangladesh. What's your observation about voting environment of this election? Do you have any observation? What's your observation about the voting environment of the local government upazila election?

**Ambassador Mozena:** I had the good fortune of observing one myself up in Ghazipur before I left, and we have a team out today doing observations. So I wouldn't want to prejudge what they saw. In fact I haven't been at my desk today so I don't know what they phoned in. But the results of all of our observations we will not give first to you, we will in fact give first to the authorities, like all the other observers.

As a general statement I would say that of course violence is not part of the democratic process. So wherever there was violence, then that would not be part of the democratic process.

**Press:** (Kabir Bhuyian, *The Independent*) Ambassador, nice to have you back.

You said at the close of your statement that it is nice to be back home. My question will be related to your home. You say that you have observers out in the field, you will not comment until you get report from the observers. But about the last four phases of election what's your observation?

**Ambassador Mozena:** All of that goes forward.

**Press:** (Kabir Bhuyian, *The Independent*) All of them go forward.

**Ambassador Mozena:** Yeah, so today is the fifth tranche, and we'll collect it and submit it.

**Press:** (Kabir Bhuyian, *The Independent*) Okay.

My next thing to know was that, what is the difference between the United States government and Bangladesh government, between October 2013 and March 2014? What is the difference between the relationship between these governments in six months?

**Ambassador Mozena:** What happened in October? I don't know.

**Press:** (Kabir Bhuyian, *The Independent*) What is the difference between relations between October and today?

**Ambassador Mozena:** I guess I'm not sure what happened in October, but regardless, we have a partnership with Bangladesh. We work with the government of Bangladesh. I'm very proud of that partnership. When I arrived here, and a few of you remember this, I arrived November 19, 2011. Kabir was there, Shamin was there. I can't remember who else. Some people were there. I said I came with a mandate to broaden, deepen and strengthen this partnership and we have the same mandate. We will work with this government very closely to bolster this partnership. That's why we're having a security dialogue meeting in a couple of weeks. It's why we're having a TICFA meeting a week later. We're going to keep building this partnership.

We have come a long way. If I have my way, we will keep building and we'll keep building and we'll keep building.

I said one time that the sky is the limit from America's perspective. That's still the case. We will build this partnership.

**Press:** (Shahrier Zaman from the *Dhaka Tribune*) Thank you. Ambassador, welcome back. Probably this is the first time you have had a press conference after January 5 election. So I am taking advantage of that --

**Ambassador Mozena:** I don't think so. Didn't I have --

**Press:** No. After January 5 you didn't have any press conference.

**Press:** You did speak to us.

**Press:** (Shahrier Zaman from the *Dhaka Tribune*) You did, but this is the first press conference. So my question is the relationship you had before January 5 election and the relationship you have right now, is there any difference between the two governments? That is the first one.

The second one, you said that you talked about the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor in Washington. In the Chief of Missions meeting have you discussed this issue with other ambassadors like U.S. Ambassador to China, or U.S. Ambassador to India? And you also told you discussed this issue with Capitol Hill with dozens of staffers. What are the issues you discussed with the Capitol Hill staffers?

**Ambassador Mozena:** The Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor generates a lot of interest because President Obama and the U.S. government believe that one of the great trade routes of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will be the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor linking South Asia with Central Asia. They call it the New Silk Road. Linking Central Asia with South Asia, with Bangladesh, with the world. So we talked about that a lot.

We talked about, in the most immediate sense, the transmission of power. You already see some of that with the 500 megawatts flowing from India into Bangladesh. I have a much bigger vision. I imagine 10,000 megawatts coming from Bhutan into Bangladesh. Why not? It's there. It's untapped. Bangladesh needs that power. That's a way to get it.

Other people have other visions of minerals and other natural resources flowing out of Central Asia to fuel the economic growth of India, of Bangladesh, of beyond.

Never sell Bangladesh short. It's the 7<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world. It should have an economy of commensurate size. You have heard me talk about the fact that as I travel all over this country as much as many of you, I learn how rich the place is.

So one my themes, I forgot to mention it before, was to tell all these audiences, never mention to me tiny, poor Bangladesh. Because Bangladesh is not tiny, Bangladesh is not poor. Bangladesh is huge. I'm quoting myself. It's the 7<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world. Bangladesh is rich. It has poor people, that's true. Many poor people. That's a different thing.

On the first half of your question, I've answered it now three times.

**Press:** Thank you. This is Nurul Hasib from *BDNews24.com*. Excellency, if I recall, January 6<sup>th</sup> statement, you are the first country who called for fresh elections as soon as possible. And after that some media reports that you preferred June for that elections. So what would be your position right now?

And second part of the election is recently Russia is showing interest in Bangladesh and Russian Ambassador said they are coming back to Bangladesh seriously and for a long time. Given your relations with Russia, after Crimea and Syria issues, what would be your comment?

**Ambassador Mozena:** The statement speaks for itself. It's written in clear English, I don't need to translate it. So the statement --

**Press:** (Nurul Hasib, *BDNews24.com*) what is your latest position?

**Ambassador Mozena:** The statement is the latest position.

**Press:** (Nurul Hasib, *BDNews24.com*) Do you want the election by June?

**Ambassador Mozena:** No, this is April. That ain't going to happen.

U.S. policy is the January 6<sup>th</sup> statement. No more, no less. Just take that statement. That's it. If you don't want to use that statement then use Nisha Biswal's statement on February 11. It's identical. That's our policy.

What was the second half? Oh, on Russia, then you should ask the Russian Ambassador about his views.

**Press:** (Nurul Hasib from *BDNews24.com*) He said Russia is coming back to Bangladesh seriously and for a long time. They are engaging public diplomacy. Given the situation I mean world situation between the U.S. and Russia.

**Ambassador Mozena:** You can talk to the Russian Ambassador about Russia's engagement with Bangladesh. But I would love to talk about America's engagement with Bangladesh.

**Press:** (Nurul Hasib from *BDNews24.com*) If you allow me just one point if Bangladesh seriously engage with Russia what will be the U.S. policy?

**Ambassador Mozena:** U.S. policy is U.S. policy. What we do is engage with Bangladesh through all of these mechanisms I just described to the mutual benefit of both of our countries. That's our policy. You're asking me about somebody else's policy. You ask them about their policy.

**Press:**(Mainul Alam from *Ittefaq*)During your time last two years and four months or three months time --

**Ambassador Mozena:** Are you doing a countdown to get rid of me? [Laughter]. That's scary.

**Press:** (Mainul Alam, *Ittefaq*) This time our relation between Dhaka and Washington got new height. In coming months can we expect any high level visit from here to Washington or from Washington to Dhaka? Is there any plan, or are you making anything ground work?

**Ambassador Mozena:** You know when I arrived I said at the airport that my dream was to have the then Secretary of State come, and she came. Six months later. I have many dreams. I work very hard to make dreams come true. I'll leave it at that.

**Press:** (Lotus Karim from *The Daily Star*) You know that Bangladesh abstained from voting in UN General Assembly regarding the Crimea issue. What is your position? Do you think that it's a shift of Bangladesh foreign policy?

**Ambassador Mozena:** I saw the vote and it was a very large vote, that resolution passed by a large majority. I can't remember the actual number, but it makes clear that the international community does not accept the occupation, the annexation I should say, by Russia of Crimea, and I regret that Bangladesh was not able to join the majority on that important issue.

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