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**REMARKS
BY
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Shekil Chowdhury, Chairman, Center for Non-Resident Bangladeshis

... and a roomful of such dignitaries that if I mention one of you by name, I'll need to do so for everyone.

Asalaam 'm-laikum, nameskar and good morning

Listen ... do you hear it?

Tick ... tick ...

The clock ticks on ...

... tick ... tick ... tick ...

In just a week the final curtain will come down on both my ambassadorship in Bangladesh and my 33-year Foreign Service career.

As you might imagine, it is for me a time of reflection as I look back over my three year tenure as steward of America's partnership with Bangladesh, wondrous Bangladesh, strategically important Bangladesh ... Bangladesh, the eighth largest country in the world ... Bangladesh, the third largest Muslim-majority country in the world ... Bangladesh, a moderate, tolerant, secular, pluralistic alternative to violent extremism ... indeed, Bangladesh is a country of deep strategic importance to America.

Reflecting on my tenure here, I am pleased that America's partnership with Bangladesh is today broader, deeper, stronger than ever ... literally ... and the partnership goes from strength to strength with each passing day.

Some of you may be surprised by my words ... some of you may think that I am merely chanting diplomatic niceties.

Not so ...

I speak of facts ... clear facts ... our partnership truly strengthens each day, to the benefit of the people of both countries.

Perhaps, some of you are curious about my assertion, given press reports that you might have seen recently.

I am a disciple of Martin Luther King, Jr., who often exhorted his followers to “keep your eye on the prize.” I fervently adhere to his philosophy and keep my eye fixed on the prize of promoting America’s partnership with Bangladesh.

Never in my Foreign Service career have I known a more productive relationship than the America-Bangladesh partnership, which helps Bangladesh make historic achievements, such as:

- slashing maternal mortality by over 60%;
- slashing child-under-five mortality by nearly two-thirds by reducing the impact of infectious diseases so much that drowning is now the number one cause of death of Bangladeshi children between the ages of one year and five years;
- enabling Bangladeshis to have the family size they want, which has reduced the fertility rate from 6.3 live births per woman in 1971 to around 2.2 today. Further reductions could take the rate to replacement level of 2.1 live births next year ... this is an amazing achievement;
- increasing food security through expanded food production and greater access to food. We all know that Bangladesh is exporting 50,000 tons of rice to Sri Lanka this year ... what an achievement for a country once famously described as a basket case! Bangladesh is in fact an overflowing basket of agricultural bounty as our partnership with Bangladesh has engaged over 2.2 million farmers on using new methods of fertilization to reduce fertilizer consumption while increasing yields. Our partnership has also introduced more than 370,000 farmers to new, improved seed varieties;
- mitigating for the effects of climate change. Just yesterday I visited Madarbumia Chakma Para village in Cox’s Bazar and saw firsthand the success of partnership in encouraging people to protect rather than destroy the forests that buffer Bangladesh from the effects of climate change. One village woman so moved me with her statement: “If we protect the forest, the forest will protect us;”
- strengthening democratic institutions and promoting respect for human rights. The partnership is working to bolster local government and other institutions of governance. The partnership is also helping the police transform the philosophy of policing to one based on engagement with the community. Also, the partnership is working with the RAB to introduce greater accountability for officers’ conduct;
- enhancing security. The partnership has yielded great results in enabling the Bangladesh Navy, Bangladesh Coast Guard, and the Border Guard of Bangladesh to better secure the nation’s maritime and land borders to stop trafficking of people, drugs, and arms, to interdict terrorists, and to protect maritime assets. I am pleased that the partnership has created a Bangladesh version of the Navy Seals and has so enhanced maritime security that robberies in the Bay have fallen by 70%, insurance rates have fallen by 40% and Chittagong is no

longer categorized as a high risk port. Next spring America will turn over a second 378 foot cutter to help Bangladesh control its waters.

- Bolstering preparedness to respond to disasters. We continue to build new cyclone shelters ... about 130 more have been built or are in varying stages of being built during my tenure. We also work with Bangladesh on preparing for an earthquake.

I could go on and on recounting the success of America's partnership with Bangladesh, but I think that I've made my point that this partnership is rich, varied, vibrant and successful. I could not be more pleased.

The Bangladeshi-American diaspora add an important dimension to the partnership.

I spent three or four weeks during each year of my tenure, traveling throughout America to engage the Bangladeshi-American diaspora and share with them how they could add to America's partnership with Bangladesh. I have a four part agenda with the diaspora.

First, I urge them to explore investing their know-how, their problem-solving ability, their resources in Bangladesh. I am excited by the growing engagement of Bangladeshi-Americans in Bangladesh in so many critical areas: solar powered nano-grids, software development, semi-conductor production, to name only a few recent ventures.

Second, I urge them to mentor young Bangladeshi entrepreneurs. We have set up a program to match Bangladeshi-Americans mentors with emerging entrepreneurs.

Third, I urge my Bangladeshi-American friends to donate to Bangladesh. We have established an online portal ... liftbangla.org ... which enables them to donate in confidence to vetted organizations in Bangladesh ... donors get a US tax credit for their generosity.

Fourth, I urge Bangladeshi-Americans to encourage their Bangladeshi friends and family members to pursue education in the U.S. I am pleased that the number of Bangladeshis studying in the U.S. has gone up about 16% or so for each of the past two years.

Again, I hope that I have made my point: the Bangladeshi-American diaspora play an ever more important role in building the people-to-people ties that so strengthen America's partnership with Bangladesh.

I see that Shekil is making faces at me, so I have better stop.

I will end by deeply thanking the people, civil society and government of Bangladesh and the Bangladeshi-American diaspora for making my tenure in Bangladesh so rich and rewarding.

My heart is heavy as I contemplate my imminent departure from Wonderful Bangladesh. I hope that I can find some way to stay engaged by continuing to tell the story of this great nation.

Thank you.