

EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-885-55-00

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: DhakaPA@state.gov

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



**STATEMENT TO THE PRESS
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOUTH AND CENTRAL
ASIAN AFFAIRS
ROBERT O. BLAKE
NATIONAL PRESS CLUB
FEBRUARY 16, 2012**

Good afternoon.

I'm so pleased to be back here in Bangladesh. I always enjoy coming to Dhaka to see the dynamic changes that are underway. I thank the people of Bangladesh for their warm welcome and hospitality.

I began my trip by participating in ceremonies commemorating the 40th anniversary of Senator Kennedy's historic 1972 visit. Ambassador Mozena announced our intention to establish a new center for public service and the arts in downtown Dhaka to serve as a gathering place for young Bangladeshis.

We heard about how Senator Kennedy's example of public service has inspired many Bangladeshis.

Korvi Rakshand, for example, created JAAGO to bring education to children in slums and then launched Volunteer for Bangladesh in 2011.

Already 7,000 young Bangladeshis are volunteering to bring solutions to problems in their communities throughout Bangladesh.

Likewise, Ejaj Ahmed, a Harvard graduate, founded the Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center, with assistance from the American Center, to formulate innovative solutions to local problems such as water and sanitation.

Yesterday I was delighted to have the opportunity to visit the Asian University for Women that is doing so much to strengthen Bangladesh's already impressive record of women's empowerment.

Earlier today I was pleased to participate in the 21st annual trade show. Bilateral trade between the United States and Bangladesh now tops \$6 billion.

I also witnessed a signing of a \$250 million deal between General Electric and the Summit Group to develop the Meghnaghat power plant project.

I appreciated the honor of meeting the Honorable Prime Minister as well as Honorable Foreign Minister Moni and the Honorable Leader of the Opposition.

In my meetings with the government, I welcomed the progress we are making in other parts of our multi-faceted agenda:

- Our strong cooperation on counterterrorism;
- Our development partnership that has helped Bangladesh reduce maternal and child mortality and improved access to family planning; and
- Bangladesh's participation in all four of President Obama's global initiatives on food security, improving global health, combating the effects of climate change, and expanding engagement with the Muslim world.

I was pleased the Prime Minister welcomed our suggestion that the Peace Corps send an assessment team to Bangladesh to explore the possibility of returning the Peace Corps to your country.

In all my meetings I also emphasized the importance of Bangladesh's finding an eminently qualified successor to Dr. Yunus as managing director of Grameen Bank, who can preserve the integrity and effectiveness of the bank and the interests of its shareholders.

Last, I urged our friends in government to ensure continued space for free media and vigorous non-governmental organizations.

Civil society representatives expressed concern to me that the draft NGO law could shrink that space.

We are pleased that the NGO Affairs Bureau is soliciting views from civil society on the legislation and has welcomed the visit of an independent American expert to provide his views on the legislation.

In conclusion, I have enjoyed another stimulating and productive visit and would be happy to take your questions.

=====

GR/ 2012