

**EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION**

TEL: 8802-55662000

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: [DhakaPA@state.gov](mailto:DhakaPA@state.gov)

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



**REMARKS  
BY  
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH  
MARCIA STEPHENS BLOOM BERNICAT**

**PRESS CONFERENCE  
AMERICAN CLUB  
DHAKA, FEBRUARY 17, 2015**

Assalamualaikum, Namashkar. Hello and welcome. Thank you all for coming.

For 30 years I have sought to be posted in Bangladesh. I am thrilled to finally be here, and to build on the efforts of so many to help our relationship become even broader and deeper.

I recently had the honor of meeting with President Md. Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and Foreign Minister Mahmood Ali, among others. In those meetings, I reaffirmed the United States' longstanding commitment to Bangladesh, the eighth most populous country in the world, with a tradition of tolerance and moderation and strong democratic roots.

Bangladesh is the largest contributor to peacekeeping operations in the world. It has a rapidly growing economy. It is an important player in South Asia's future regional connectivity and a leader among developing countries on environmental issues. And your country has made unprecedented strides in health, food security, and poverty reduction in its short history as an independent country. For all of these reasons, the United States has a strategic interest in partnering with Bangladesh.

The government-to government ties are important, but we should recognize they play a supporting role for something even more impressive . . . the strong and organic people-to-people ties that continue to lead and define our relationship. With a Bangladesh diaspora half a million strong living in every corner of the United States, hundreds of thousands of other Bangladeshis

who have studied or lived in the United States, and the growing number of Americans who visit or live in Bangladesh, it is the people of our two countries who are, more than ever, driving our relations forward.

Bangladesh has achieved a very impressive sustained economic growth of around 6% annually over the past twenty years. We are proud to be Bangladesh's largest single export market, a leading source of investment, and its third largest source of remittances. U.S. companies – blue chip companies, such as GE, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, Coke, and Pepsi – have large footprints here, and we want to increase these kinds of economic relationships between our two countries.

The United States also deeply values the close security cooperation we enjoy with Bangladesh. We support the Bangladesh armed services with regard to maritime security and UN Peacekeeping Operations; we work with Bangladesh on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief preparation; and we provide professional development for military personnel through courses, conferences, and seminars.

The United States is particularly grateful for Bangladesh's cooperation in countering terrorism. In this regard, I am very pleased that Foreign Minister Mahmood Ali and Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque will attend the Countering Violent Extremism Summit beginning tomorrow at the White House. Foreign Minister Mahmood Ali will also meet with Secretary of State John Kerry while he is in Washington, DC.

We have recently expressed concern about the ongoing unrest and violence in Bangladesh. The United States deplores the unconscionable attacks, including bus burnings and train derailments that have killed and wounded so many innocent victims. We have condemned in the strongest terms the use of violence for political objectives, believing that there is simply no justification for such actions in a democratic Bangladesh. Everyone has a role to play in stopping the violence, to resolve their differences through non-violent and responsible political expression.

Let me take this opportunity to say very directly that the United States does not back any particular political force or party in Bangladesh. Our intention is to work with all Bangladeshis, including a government that is receptive to a broader and deeper bilateral relationship with the United States.

Looking ahead, we want to promote a middle-income Bangladesh that is secure and prosperous, prepared to adapt to climate change and handle natural disasters, with a population that enjoys good health and ample educational opportunities.

The U.S.-Bangladesh relationship is one of America's most important partnerships. It is a relationship that is based on trust and respect for our shared values and common interests. We have so much good work to build on. Our focus now is to look ahead and move the relationship forward. I am eager to work with the government, the opposition, and civil society on our vital and common interests over the coming years of my tenure.

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*\*As prepared for delivery*