

# Cross-Party Group on Bangladesh

CPG Meeting– 19 June 2024, 18:00-19:30, CR1

## In Attendance

### MSPs

Foysol Choudhury MSP  
Miles Briggs MSP

### Non- MSP CPG Members

HE Saida Muna Tasneem, High Commissioner of Bangladesh to the UK  
Mohammad Hazrat Ali Khan, Deputy High Commissioner  
Tanvir Mohammad Azim, Commercial Counsellor  
Wing Commander Md Saifur Rahman, Assistant Defence Adviser  
Moumita Zeenat, Counsellor (Political)  
Juned Hussain Chowdhury  
Md Mosheur Rahman  
Ibrahim Rashid - University of Stirling, UK and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman  
Agricultural University(BSMRAU), Bangladesh.  
Robiul Islam  
Ehtesham Hasnain - Bangladesh Association Glasgow  
Farhana Kabir - HFRP  
Aladin Ali  
Nazia Sharmin - BRAC International  
Abu Saleh Md Masum  
Abu Meron - EBS Community News  
Md Mokaddes Hossain  
Md. Nayem Dewan  
Kohinur Sultana Chowdhury  
Alexander Dindial - University of Stirling  
M. MOZAMMEL HUQ - Charity Education International (CEI). Also Bangladesh  
Association Glasgow  
Md Abaidur Rahman  
Khaled Choudhury  
Kabir Uddin Ahmed - University of Stirling  
Nurul Hoque Ali - Aberdeen City Council  
Dr Shaif Uddin - University of the West of Scotland and The Bangla Centre SCIO  
Ahmed Ali (Jubu)  
Muhammad bodrul husain - Bangladeshi students association of Scotland

### Invited Guests

Md. Suleman Khan  
Syed Shamsul Islam  
Shahnoor Chowdhury  
Autaur Rahman  
Ala Uddin  
Jahed Ahmed

Mustafizun Rahman  
Irina Lazarenko  
M. Mozammel Huq  
Md Noor Alam  
Shabrum Khili  
Farhane Kabir  
Md, Mahbubul Kabir

And other Individual Members of the Scotland's Bangladeshi Community

### **Apologies**

Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh  
Sarah Boyack MSP  
Cllr Nurul Ali

### **Agenda Item 1: Welcome**

- Approval of last meeting's minutes from 19th December 2023
- Introduction of CPG Members and Bangladesh High Commission Officers
- Foyso Choudhury MSP welcomed the High Commissioner of Bangladesh, CPG Members and guests at meeting. He reiterated aims of the CPG to strengthen the relationship between Scotland and Bangladesh.
- Following the CPG trip to Dhaka in November, CPG Members of the delegation noted need to bridge gap to create educational opportunities and research collaboration between Scotland and Bangladesh particularly in fields of agriculture, fishing and climate action. Hence, decision to make the meeting focus on developing greater educational collaboration between Scotland and Bangladesh.

### **Agenda Item 2: Cooperation between Bangladesh and Scotland**

- Update from CPG Convenors
- Reiterated their commitment to the Bangladeshi community of Scotland.

#### **a) Defence Cooperation**

- Convenors updated CPG Members about creating military connections since Dhaka trip in November to
  - Foyso and Miles met with CEO of The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo –to discuss the potential of strengthening relations and create cultural link between Edinburgh Military Tattoo and Bangladesh Military.
- Noted during meeting that large Bangladeshi communities in Scotland and rest of the UK will help widen UK audience to come to Edinburgh Military and further promote Brand Scotland across the world.

- CPG to arrange a meeting between Bangladeshi Government, Royal Edinburgh Military, High Commissioner of Bangladesh to the UK to discuss this exciting proposal to showcase for the first time Bangladesh Military Band and their unique skills.
- Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo to send their proposals.
- Agreed to find out what Edinburgh Military tattoo needs i.e. cast size, performance, skills and how best to showcase Bangladesh
- Miles Briggs noted on practicalities during 6-week long military tattoo, hoping to facilitate this great opportunity for Bangladeshi military band to showcase their skills for the first time in Edinburgh.

## b) Educational cooperation; Bangladesh - Scottish Universities

*As way of background -*

- During CPG visit to Dhaka last November 2023, CPG met with H.E. Sheikh Hasina and the Foreign Minister Dr A.K. Abdul Momen, discussing one of the priorities and agreed on importance of generating shared links between education institutions in Bangladesh and Scotland.
- Additionally, met with many universities with potential to create Scottish University campuses in Bangladesh
- Convenors, Foysol and Miles updated CPG Members on their recent meeting with Scottish Universities to start the conversation and discuss how to move forward – during meeting both highlighted number of opportunities for education and research collaboration (*specifically around agriculture, climate change and fishing*) – *noting progress has been slow but will follow up.*
- **Universities Scotland** linked the CPG with **Connected Scotland** to follow through bringing Scottish and Bangladeshi universities together – sort of “speed dating” exercise to see how they can complement each other – what projects are in both Scotland and Bangladesh--> to create link with students, teaching and research collaboration.
- The **CPG has also written to H.E. Sheikh Hasina** to see if she has any suggestions and contributions she wishes to make as to how we can build educational relationships between Bangladesh and Scotland.
- Concluded definite need to bridge a gap to reinforce educational collaboration with Scottish and Bangladeshi universities and create Scottish University campuses in Dhaka and beyond.
- Touched upon climate change as top priority on CPG agenda and focal point for future visits.
- Miles warmly thanked the BHC and her team – extending special thanks to Moumita Zaina for her hard work and coordinating the trip.

## **Agenda Item 3: Cooperation between Bangladesh and Scotland**

### **❖ Speaker 1: Update from H.E. Saida Muna Tasneem, Bangladesh High Commissioner (BHC) to the UK & Ireland, London**

- Thanked both Convenor and Deputy Convenor for the meeting. BHC extended her thanks to both Sarah Boyack and Evelyn Tweed MSPs who could not join – who have been both great supporters of Bangladesh-Scottish relations; and thanked guest speakers Peter Brown from British Council, Sterling University Assistant Professor as well community members.
- Noting she was joined virtually by Deputy High Commissioner; Minister, Political' Commercial Counsellor, Mr Tanveer Lazeem and Assistant Defence Advisor, Wing Commander; Political Counsellors Moumita Zenat and Mr Monirul
- Expressed thanks to CPG Bangladesh – describing it as a game changer in Bangladesh and bringing vibrancy to Scottish-Bangladeshi relations; noting importance of parliamentary motions.
- Acknowledged history of Bangladesh's Independence and legacy left by its founding father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, noted in previous meeting minutes
- Noted climate change as centrepiece of cooperation between Scotland and Bangladesh.

### **Update on recent Cyclone**

- Cyclone Rima hit Bangladesh last May, taking 16 lives – this could have been worse – noting Bangladesh globally ranked as best disaster management countries
- Further impacts noted – nearly \$4 billion properties destroyed.
- Noted annual floodings in Sylhet becoming more frequent with flash floods hitting the region in 2022, 2023 and again 2024– this year's caused. 1.25 people impacted, having their homes under water.
- Bangladeshi Government's greatest challenge – PM oversee flood support for people; created 538 flood shelters, provided relief operations and all necessary amenities to prevent disease breakout
- BHC expressed gratitude to the British Bangladeshi diaspora and support with humanitarian efforts and repatriating flood affected people.

### **Culture:**

- BHC provided update regarding further progress on Culture Memorandum of Understanding – proposal for exploring on culture cooperation between Bangladesh and Scotland
- Noted New Culture Minister of Bangladesh keen interest to take part in Edinburgh Cultural festivals in August.

### **Bilateral relations**

- Reaffirmed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina bilateral relations with the UK- looks forward to leadership announced on 4<sup>th</sup> July and working with Scottish Government.

- Thanked Foysol Choudhury MSP for moving a motion at the Scottish Parliament on National Mourning Day of Bangladesh. [S6M-05606 | Scottish Parliament Website](#)
- BHC described past 2-3 years as golden years of UK-Bangladeshi relations with 3 agreements made.
  - Aviation partnership agreements: Bangladesh to procure 10 airbuses signed in London in May 2023.
  - Climate Act signed – area Bangladesh is keen to work on with Scotland.
  - Standard Operating Procedure –
- Over past 3 years, Bangladesh created further dialogues with UK - institutional framework via economic cooperation- trade investment and defence.

### **Economic, Trade and Investment Cooperation**

- Note record breaking bilateral trade relations between Bangladesh and UK – crossing \$6.2billion.
- First quarter of 2024 – 5% growth compared to last year’s first quarter.
- Exports mostly apparel – but growth in diversity with new added products such as mangoes; teas and manuka honey – sold at Holland & Barrett.
- British investors established first Fair Pay high quality Bangladeshi teas.
- 26,700 skilled professionals received work permit visas to join the world market including hospitality, medical, caregiving sectors to support shortages of skilled staff.

### **Education**

- 2020 - around 15 000 Bangladeshi students in UK, went down to around 9,000 in 2023,
- Plenty of scope to recruit more Bangladeshi students to UK universities –
- Research collaboration on renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, manufacturing and STEM education.
- 500 Bangalore Scholarships but issues that scholarships have depleted since Covid. Need for more students from Bangladesh to study in Scottish Universities and more opportunities for young women to study STEM subjects including renewable energy.

### **International Strategy**

- Pacific strategy – 2023 Bangladeshi PM announced plans to have Indo Pacific outlook towards more free open, peaceful secure, inclusive Pacific
- Following 5<sup>th</sup> strategic dialogue in Dhaka in September 2023, Plans to deepen strategic and security partnership with UK, to enhance maritime security cooperation at the Bay of Bengal,

### **Rohingya Case**

- BHC recognised leadership of Sheikh Hasina – since opening the Border in 2017 to aid persecuted Rohingya people fleeing Myanmar.

- Sheltering 1.1million people – Bangladesh Govt continues to spend \$2billion per year.
- BHC noted discussions with British Security Council regarding issue of Myanmar and Rohingya – further conveying readiness to engage more with Scottish politicians as current situation at borders is unstable.
- UK Parliament actively supporting dialogues and debates on Rohingya.

### **Defence Cooperation**

- BHC reflected on engagement with Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo as defence dialogue
- Noted Bangladeshi army contingents participated in Late Majesty’s Platinum Jubilee Parade and Majesty’s Coronation parades.
- Looking forward to the Bangladeshi Military Band participation in Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

### **Diaspora**

- BHC thanked all diaspora members from across Scotland who continually contribute in connecting UK and Bangladesh via businesses, charities, educational institutions, climate change investments.
- Expressed keen willingness to engage more with Scottish-Bangladeshi diaspora and hearing more recommendations to create new partnerships.
- Noted Bangladeshi diaspora population is growing in Scotland – next delegation consular visit in July 2024 to help with any consular services.- large demand of consular services in Dundee, Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

### **Climate**

- Bangladesh takes leadership in climate justice – 2 cases: One for International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea on climate change impacts, submitted by Small States Commission and one for International Court of Justice (ICJ).
- International advice for Bangladesh to get compensation or engage in carbon trading.
- Wants to see more investments from Scottish companies to come into Bangladesh.

### **Infrastructure**

- Padma Bridge – commended that 3 senior engineers closely involved in project had PhDs from University of Strathclyde University.

### **• Speaker 3: Update from Peter Brown, Director, British Council Scotland**

- Provided update from British Council in Scotland and from colleagues in Dhaka.

- British Council's Mission: Build peace and prosperity through educational and cultural connections, fostering trust between the UK and other countries, including Bangladesh.
- Focus Areas: Arts & culture, education, and English language.
- Bangladeshi Students: Approximately 780 Bangladeshi students in Scotland (across 13 of 19 universities).
- Partnerships: British Council supports initiatives like Going Global Partnerships, Transnational Education, and gender equity in higher education.
- Scholarship Opportunities: includes Commonwealth Scholarships, Great Scholarships, and Chevening Scholarships for Bangladeshi students.
- Cultural Collaboration: Discussed the idea of creating a Shahid Minar in Edinburgh to promote Bangladesh's International Mother Language Day.
- Vocational Education: Focus on Technical and Vocational Education and Training partnerships and grants, especially in sectors like nursing.
- Future Actions: British Council will support further dialogues on education and cultural exchange between Bangladesh and Scotland.

#### **Agenda Item 4: Bangladeshi Students Voices**

##### **Speaker 4: Presentation from Ibrahim Rashid, PhD Fellow, Assistant Professor, Stirling University, UK**

- Education and Experiences of Bangladeshi Students
- Ibrahim Rashid – gave overview of how the education system works in Bangladesh
- Noted 53 public universities, 107 private universities and 3 international ones in Bangladesh
- English used as medium of instructions

#### **Agenda Item 5: Open Discussion**

*Questions taken from Members and Guests*

Open discussion & Actions to follow-up

- **Education & Student support:** Student commented on Student mental health, and cultural differences for Bangladeshi students to accommodate to different country, culture – locating southeast shops in Scotland; changes in weather patterns; need to find their way; noted good Bangladeshi community support.
- University of Edinburgh Bangladeshi Society celebrated International Mother Language Day and Pôhela Boishakh (Bengali New Year)

- Welcome Bangladeshi students programme to help settle in smoothly in student life during their academic studies to be organised by student society. CPG can provide good contact links to support students.
- **Climate Funding:** Comment taken by BHC from Member re Climate Finance – commitment not kept, \$100, billion not received – **Bangladesh Climate Trust Fund** established after Copenhagen visit 2009. Self-financed \$500 million and adaptation projects; need to access all mechanisms, carbon trading - Bangladesh needs more expertise in the area.
- Bangladesh have Delta plan 2100 with Netherlands.
- CPG Member commented on need for Bangladesh Govt to dig rivers and have a programme to control annual floodings.
- BHC responded- low-lying land vulnerability to climate change and funding needs to dredge rivers and need to re-look at drainage system.
- Member commented at need for skills around climate change engineering.
- Members expressed disappointments that pledges made at COP never actually come true.

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#### **Agenda Item 6:**

Date and Time of **Next Meeting** to be confirmed

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