

Fourth Bangladesh – UK Strategic Dialogue Communique

World news story

Bangladesh and the United Kingdom held their fourth Strategic Dialogue on 9 September 2021 in London, UK.



The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) of the United Kingdom and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, led respectively by FCDO Permanent Under-Secretary Sir Philip Barton and Bangladesh Foreign Secretary (Senior Secretary) Ambassador Masud Bin Momen, held the fourth UK-Bangladesh Strategic Dialogue on 9 September 2021 in London, UK.

The Strategic Dialogue involved a productive exchange of views across the entire breadth of bilateral relations between the UK and Bangladesh, covering political and diplomatic relations, global and regional issues, economic and development partnerships, and security and defence.

Political and diplomatic relations

1. In the 50th anniversary year of Bangladesh's independence, both countries reaffirmed the strength and dynamism of bilateral relations since 1971. The UK and Bangladesh used the Strategic Dialogue to further this historic friendship, recalling the UK's role as one of the first nations to recognise an independent Bangladesh and looking ahead to a growing relationship, including through high-level political engagement. Both countries recalled Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historic visit to London on 8 January 1972, including his meeting with Prime Minister Edward Heath, before returning to lead a newly independent Bangladesh.
2. Both countries recognised the value of deep social, cultural, intellectual and people-to-people links, including vibrant diaspora connections and our shared membership of the Commonwealth.

3. In light of the ongoing COVID-19 situation, both countries expressed their deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones during the pandemic. The UK and Bangladesh acknowledged that COVID-19 had caused significant challenges for their health systems, including in the recent wave of the Delta variant. Bangladesh expressed appreciation for UK support and the UK noted Bangladesh's efforts to ensure a continued supply of vaccines including through COVAX, internal, and external sources. The UK congratulated Bangladesh on rolling out the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination campaign and both countries committed to sharing data to inform decisions affecting travel between the UK and Bangladesh.
4. Both sides celebrated Bangladesh's historic achievements in establishing a secular democracy after independence and beyond. The UK raised human rights issues, including about the Digital Security Act. Both countries agreed on the importance of free and fair elections, on vibrant civil society to promote accountable governance and institutions, and on freedom of expression and religion. Both countries agreed to deepen co-operation further including Mutual Legal Assistance and extradition requests.
5. The UK and Bangladesh welcomed the contribution of the British Bangladeshi community to the national life of the UK, including in the National Health Service, and the depth of the bilateral migration relationship between both countries. Both countries agreed to continue to develop their bilateral relationship on migration, including through technical discussions to follow the Strategic Dialogue. The UK noted the opportunities provided by the new points-based immigration system which prioritises the skills people have to offer rather than where they come from, including provision for eligible students to be able to stay, live and work following successful completion of an undergraduate or postgraduate degree in the UK, applicable to Bangladesh under the new Graduate route. The UK committed to delivering an immigration system that offered opportunities for the brightest and best talent from Bangladesh and around the world to come to the UK to study, work and live. The UK and Bangladesh also agreed to continue working on bilateral returns cooperation as a core element of their migration partnership. The UK highlighted its comprehensive visa service within Bangladesh, with a full range of visa services being available to Bangladeshi customers.
6. The UK appreciated Bangladesh's leadership on 'Educating the Girl Child' campaign and on initiatives to support the empowerment of women. Both countries agreed on the importance of education for women and girls, in particular 12 years of quality education, to build human capital, prevent gender-based violence, reduce child marriage, and increase girls' life opportunities. The two sides noted the gender parity achieved in primary and secondary education in Bangladesh.

7. The UK and Bangladesh recognised that COVID-19 has caused both countries to make difficult decisions to protect public health. The UK warmly welcomed the re-opening of all schools across Bangladesh, with good safety measures in place. The UK also congratulated Bangladesh on actions to ensure that distance learning was provided, and urged Bangladesh to do more to reach the most vulnerable children, particularly ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, and those living in remote areas.
8. The UK and Bangladesh recognised the need to strengthen the quality of tertiary education to develop Bangladesh's human capital. The UK praised steps already taken and noted the increasing demand in Bangladesh for high quality tertiary education, as well as interest in opportunities in Bangladesh among leading UK universities and requested that Bangladesh implement the Cross Border Higher Education Act to allow higher education partnerships to grow between the two countries.
9. Both countries agreed that the current Memorandum of Understanding on the activities of the British Council in Bangladesh should be modernised and renewed to reflect the evolved nature of the British Council's operations.

Global and regional issues

1. Following the UK's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, the UK highlighted its long-term commitment to the Indo-Pacific region, recognising the region's increasing importance to a range of global challenges including conflict prevention, support for the rules based international order, countering terrorism and climate change. The UK and Bangladesh agreed to cooperate on these global challenges.
2. The UK and Bangladesh affirmed their enduring commitment to the people of Afghanistan and agreed that a democratic and inclusive Afghanistan was the best guarantee of the country's stability and development. The UK and Bangladesh further agreed that the country must not become a safe haven for terrorism, nor a source of terrorist attacks on others. Both parties committed to work closely on this issue, recognising the importance of a coordinated international response.
3. UK and Bangladesh reiterated the urgent need for all countries to take ambitious action to combat climate change. The UK as President-Designate of COP26, and Bangladesh, as Chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, pledged to use their leadership roles to raise global ambition on climate action.

4. The UK commended Bangladesh's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strongly encouraged further leadership in the coming years on a low carbon development pathway. The UK recalled its priority encouraging all countries to net zero emissions by 2050. Bangladesh welcomed the UK's actions to secure international climate finance from all sources, noting this was essential for climate-vulnerable countries like Bangladesh, and for preserving critical ecosystems such as the Sundarbans mangrove forest.
5. Both countries expressed appreciation for the UK-Bangladesh Climate Partnership, launched in January 2020, which facilitated the exchange of expertise and whole-of-society engagement. Both countries looked forward to strengthening this partnership through concrete actions.
6. Recalling atrocities committed against the Rohingya people by the Myanmar military in Rakhine State in August 2017, the UK commended Bangladesh for continuing to accommodate over one million Rohingya. The UK and Bangladesh noted that this population placed a significant burden on Bangladesh, particularly for communities living adjacent to camps. The UK and Bangladesh reiterated their commitment to the goal of safe, voluntary, dignified, and informed returns to Myanmar as soon as the situation allows. Both countries acknowledged that the military coup in Myanmar has further complicated the situation. Both countries committed to working with the international community, including ASEAN and the UN, to resolve the crisis.
7. Both countries recalled the Conference on Sustaining Support for the Rohingya Refugee Response, co-hosted by the UK, US, EU and UN in October 2020. The UK stressed the need to focus on Rohingyas' well-being, and noted that access to education and livelihoods would help prepare the Rohingya for return to Myanmar and to live more fulfilling lives while in Bangladesh. The UK committed to continuing work towards a political solution to the crisis that would enable Rohingya to return to Myanmar when it was safe to do so. The UK and Bangladesh agreed to explore the option of a high-level meeting that provides an opportunity for the regional and international community to discuss a collective approach to durable solutions, noting the need for international pressure on Myanmar and for support to the humanitarian response.
8. Both countries reaffirmed their support for the Commonwealth and for commitments made by leaders at the 2018 Heads of Government Meeting. Both countries highlighted their commitment to shared Commonwealth values including human rights, democracy, the rule of law, sustainable development, environment, gender equality and women's empowerment, education and health, and international peace and security, as set out in the Commonwealth Charter. The UK acknowledged Bangladesh's commitment to protecting the oceans by tackling marine plastics via membership of the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance. Bangladesh proposed exploring

opportunities for promoting the Blue Charter Initiative.

Economic and development partnership

1. The UK congratulated Bangladesh on being recommended by the United Nations to graduate from its Least Developed Country category in 2026. The UK reiterated its commitment to support Bangladesh achieve a smooth and successful graduation and continue its export-led growth by providing duty-free, quota free access to the UK market until 2029. The UK committed to work with Bangladesh to deliver free and fair trade by improving the functioning of the WTO and modernising global trade rules.
2. The UK, as the second largest cumulative investor in Bangladesh, welcomed the inauguration of the UK-Bangladesh Trade & Investment Dialogue in February 2021. The UK hoped that the Dialogue, especially improvements to the business environment and tackling market access barriers, would promote free and fair trade between the UK and Bangladesh and help UK companies realise the potential of Bangladesh's impressive economic growth, to the benefit of both countries' prosperity. The UK noted the potential role of the City of London in helping Bangladesh raise the private capital required to fund the next stage of growth.
3. Both countries agreed a dialogue on the future shape of their development partnership as Bangladesh consolidates middle income status. Bangladesh welcomed the UK's support in areas such as knowledge, innovation, and skill development, enhanced co-operation between British and Bangladeshi universities, and in harnessing the Blue Economy.
4. In light of the pandemic, both countries agreed to collaborate more actively so that Bangladesh continues progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. This would include new and ongoing UK technical assistance and programmatic interventions to support the economic recovery and trade capacity building, improve learning outcomes in primary and secondary education, strengthen public health services, and tackle the climate change crisis.
5. The UK welcomed Bangladesh's ambitious 8th Five-Year Plan and its prioritisation of recovery from the pandemic and highlighted the need for progress on development, including on poverty reduction, youth and female employment, and malnutrition. The UK stressed the importance of Bangladesh putting in place economic policies and systems to achieve its ambition of rapid, sustainable and green economic development; and pledged its ongoing cooperation. Bangladesh expressed interest in connectivity cooperation including for climate resilience and environmentally friendly infrastructure.

Security and defence

1. Both countries welcomed joint military cooperation, including training, professional military education and instructional exchanges, and looked forward to inaugurating a Defence Dialogue later this year. This would create opportunities for broader discussions on bilateral defence and military issues, including deployments, visits, joint exercises, training, workshops, defence supply, and procurement, and cooperation on capabilities.
2. The UK commended Bangladesh's contribution of troops to UN Peacekeeping Operations. Both countries appreciated working alongside each other in the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and through Bangladesh's leadership as current Chair of the Women Peace & Security (WPS) Chiefs of Defence (CHOD) network, which encourages the recruitment of more female peacekeepers, particularly in senior positions. Bangladesh underlined the need for adequate financing and capabilities for peacekeepers to effectively deliver on their mandate.
3. The UK reaffirmed its commitment to assisting Bangladeshi investigative, prosecuting, and judicial authorities in combatting crimes, and highlighted the importance of compliance with human rights, including to ensure that those accused of criminal offences are not able to escape justice by crossing national borders.
4. Both countries welcomed the sustained progress made in aviation security in Bangladesh including at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport and recommitted to continue close cooperation in further strengthening aviation security especially in the areas of sharing of best practices, training and capacity building.
5. Both countries agreed to observe the 50 years of the establishment of their diplomatic relations in a befitting manner, including through exchange of visits at the highest political level. Bangladesh welcomed the UK's 'BritBanglaBondhon' initiative and expressed interest in jointly organising events involving the peoples of both countries. The UK and Bangladesh discussed possibilities for enhancing sport cooperation and cultural exchanges.
6. Leaders of the Bangladesh and UK delegations expressed satisfaction at the productive discussions that took place at the fourth Bangladesh-UK Strategic Dialogue in a warm and friendly atmosphere and agreed that the next Strategic Dialogue will be held in Dhaka in 2022.

Further information

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Published 13 September 2021