

Press release: Joint Statement following the second UK-Bangladesh Strategic Dialogue

The dialogue involved a fruitful exchange of views on political and bilateral issues, economic and development cooperation, security and defence cooperation, and exchanges on current global issues, including the Rohingya crisis. The UK commended Bangladesh for hosting over one million forcibly displaced Burmese nationals. Bangladesh welcomed the UK's assurance that it remains committed to keeping the international spotlight on the Rohingya crisis, and to supporting Bangladesh in its humanitarian response and the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of the Rohingya to Burma.

The Strategic Dialogue was led by Permanent Under-Secretary of the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Sir Simon McDonald, and his Bangladeshi counterpart, Foreign Secretary Md. Shahidul Haque of the Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The meeting began with both sides noting the success of the inaugural Strategic Dialogue in Dhaka last year, and welcoming the progress made in bilateral relations. Both sides underscored the importance of an exchange of visits and interactions at the highest political level, including the visit of the UK's Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to Bangladesh in February 2018. Both sides briefed on their countries' political developments domestically and internationally.

The UK restated its commitment to maintain a high quality service for Bangladeshi nationals at the visa application centres in Dhaka and Sylhet. The UK looked forward to early implementation of the Cross-Border Higher Education Rules which will allow UK universities to operate in Bangladesh.

Both countries agreed on the importance of education for women and girls. The UK welcomed the significant progress Bangladesh has made in this area.

The UK welcomed Bangladesh's continued commitment to take back its citizens who no longer have the right to remain in the UK, and welcomed significant progress in this regard.

The UK congratulated Bangladesh for being on course to graduating to middle income country status. It welcomed Bangladesh's efforts and commitment to improving performance against the World Bank's "Doing Business Index". Both sides agreed that trade was an important tool in tackling poverty, and that increasing bilateral trade could bring significant benefits to both countries.

The UK encouraged Bangladesh to continue addressing human and labour rights issues, in the garment industries.

Both sides affirmed their strong commitment to the implementation of the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” including Sustainable Development Goals. The UK and Bangladesh reiterated the importance of coordinated global action on climate change and reaffirmed their strong support for early and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement of 2015.

Both sides agreed to work closely in support of Prime Minister May’s goal to cultivate a new, global and co-ordinated approach to eliminate forced, labour, modern forms of slavery and human trafficking.

The UK and Bangladesh reaffirmed their support for the Commonwealth and looked forward to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting to be held in London in April 2018.

Both sides agreed to arrange appropriate celebrations in London and Dhaka in 2022 to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the UK and Bangladesh.

Commenting on the Strategic Dialogue, Sir Simon McDonald said:

I was glad to host the second Strategic Dialogue with my Bangladesh counterpart Md. Shahidul Haque in London. We held good discussions across a range of high priority areas for both the UK and Bangladesh.

The Strategic Dialogue was held at an important juncture for both countries as the UK prepares to leave the European Union and Bangladesh advances to middle income country status. I repeated the UK’s commitment to continue tariff-free market access for Bangladeshi goods entering the UK market after the UK leaves the European Union.

The UK looks forward to welcoming Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit which takes place in London next month.

Commenting on the Strategic Dialogue, Md. Shahidul Haque said:

The second Strategic Dialogue provided us an important opportunity to discuss how both sides can encourage transition to a broader relationship between the UK and Bangladesh in the post-Brexit and post-LDC context. We agreed to planning now for a future development partnership focussed on innovation, knowledge, skills development and employment while continuing to ensure that no-one is left behind, especially women, girls, and people with disabilities.

We appreciated the UK Government's firm commitment to continue to provide duty-free, quota-free market access to Bangladeshi goods to the UK market after it left the European Union. We highlighted the valuable contribution that the British-Bangladeshi community continues to contribute to British society and prosperity.

Notes to Editors:

1. This was the second Strategic Dialogue between the United Kingdom and Bangladesh. The first Strategic Dialogue was hosted by Bangladesh in March 2017. The second Strategic Dialogue took place at the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The third Strategic Dialogue will be held in Dhaka in 2019.
2. The UK is Bangladesh's largest bilateral development partner.
3. The UK will host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit in London from 16-20 April.