

Cross-Party Group on Bangladesh

30.11.2022 at 6pm

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Foyso! Choudhury MSP

Miles Briggs MSP

Sarah Boyack MSP

Kaukab Stewart MSP

Invited guests

Saida Muna Tasneem, High Commissioner of Bangladesh to the UK
Kazi Ziaul Hasan, Assistant High Commissioner of Bangladesh (Manchester)

Cllr Naz Anis Miah

Cllr Lynn Wardlaw of Dunfermline

Cllr Nurul Hoque Ali

Bangladesh Glasgow Association

NRB Scotland

Greater Selhet Development & Council UK

Professionals from the Bangladeshi community of Scotland

Members of the Public with interest in Bangladesh

Non-MSP Group Members

Bangladesh Catering Association Scotland

Bangladesh Samity Edinburgh

High Commission for Bangladesh London

Edinburgh & Lothians Regional Equality Council (ELREC)

Apologies

Lord provost of Edinburgh

Jackie Baillie MSP

Katy Clark MSP

Dr Alasdair Allan MSP

Agenda item 1

Welcome

Foyso! Choudhury MSP welcomed and gave thanks to members and friends of CPG on Bangladesh for attending the meeting along with a warm welcome to guest speaker Assistant High Commissioner for Bangladesh (Manchester), Mr. Kazi Ziaul Hasan. He gave a thorough review of the previous meeting and events linked to Bangladesh hosted at the Scottish Parliament that were held earlier in the year to establish the CPG and spoke of the historical first visit to the Scottish Parliament of Her Excellency, The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, last year during COP26 in Glasgow. He reiterated the aims of the CPG to strengthen the relationship between Scotland and Bangladesh with a focus on investment/trade, tourism, travel and education. The CPG noted the Victory Day reception held at the Scottish Parliament earlier this year bringing various members of the Bangladeshi community of Scotland and MSPs together.

Agenda item 2: AGM

- **Foyso! Choudhury MSP, Miles Briggs MSP, and Sarah Boyack MSP** were nominated and agreed co-convenors of the CPG on Bangladesh.
- **High Commission of Bangladesh in London** was nominated to continue as Secretariat of the CPG.

Agenda item 3: Guest Presentation

- Assistant High Commissioner of Bangladesh (Manchester), Mr. Kazi Ziaul Hasan, introduced his presentation on Trade, Development, Bangladesh-UK relations and the Climate emergency.
- Further noting that Bangladesh has had a strong recovery from COVID-19 in 2022; was previously declared as one of the poorest nations in 1971 but has since seen exponential growing economies with predictions set to make it the 44th largest global economy.
- Mr Hasan raised the issue of Bangladesh needing more investments to create more jobs and opportunities for youth with increasing need to create high end jobs particularly with its growing tech-savvy younger generation.
- **Population:** *According to the preliminary report of "Population and Housing Census 2022"*, Bangladesh has 75% population that is literate compared to 51,77% in 2011- showing a 22% increase just over a decade. Its current population is 165 million and is set to grow to 240 million by 2070. The middle class is said to be growing and usage of hi-tech is at an all-time high.
- **Regional connectivity:** The Assistant High Commissioner (AHC) spoke at length on the great improvement in regional connectivity within Bangladesh with the recently inaugurated Padma Bridge that is set to connect 30 million people and will act as a strong point for regional connectivity. Mr Hasan expressed his dream of reconnecting to South Asian Railway network to further increase connection.
- **Further developments** were discussed such as the first ever underwater tunnel projected due to be completed next year that will reduce road distance between two cities by 41 miles. Mr Hasan raised the geographical divide between the Northern and Southern part of Bangladesh with its mighty Padma River (or Ganges). There is still

much work to reconnect the two parts of the country through development. The Assistant High Commissioner appealed to the CPG to make a visit.

- **Economy:** The Mission observed that projections show that by 2026 Bangladesh will have achieved a middle-class country status. However, challenges were noted regarding Market access in the UK, EU and US as well as transfer of technology notably to adapt and mitigate climate change – which Bangladesh, low-lying country is particularly susceptible to as seen in recent months with the devastating flooding.
- **Climate change:** The AHC showed mapped projections if sea level rise by 1metre – 15 million would be impacted and 17,000 km of land would go underwater i.e. 30 % of the total land mass. The AHC reminded of the PM of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, COP26 visit whereby she advocated the climate emergency in Bangladesh, calling for a release of funds with specific commitments. Guidelines and framework reached at COP27 Summit in Egypt but the challenge is actually receipt of funds.
- **Displacement:** The arrival of 1.1 million forcibly displaced people in Bangladesh in 2017 put enormous pressure on socio-economic dynamics of Bangladesh, which has limited resources. The AHC called for more international attention on this issue that is straining economic resources.
- **Bi-lateral Relations:** The AHC noted that 50 years of strong bilateral ties between the UK and Bangladesh since its Independence in 1971 with the UK being one of the first European nations to recognise it as an Independent State. The AHC officially welcomes the Scottish Parliament to visit Bangladesh and experience the development and challenges in Bangladesh.
- The AHC concluded with his excellent presentation and thanked the CPG for facilitating his participation as keynote speaker and for coordinating the meeting.

- The High Commissioner of Bangladesh to the UK virtually joined from London speaking of the great bonds between the UK and Bangladesh, expressing her commitments to continue to work with Scotland and establish stronger ties. The High Commissioner spoke of her visit to the Scottish Parliament during COP26 when she presented a painting to the Presiding Officer of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman when he met the late Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh Prince Philip (*at the Commonwealth Head of Government Conference at Ottawa, Canada in August 1973*). The High Commissioner reiterated her commitment to work more closely with Scotland and strengthen the ties between Bangladesh and Scotland.

Agenda item 4: General Discussion

- CPG noted the need to share ideas and practices on technology, energy and climate change resilience. Further noting the importance of investment.
- Foysol Choudhury MSP spoke on issues of loss and damage, climate adaptation and environmental refugees were discussed with great concerns expressed on nations who would open their doors to welcome future climate refugees from Bangladesh.
- A member from the public pointed at the need to invest in adaptation, new technologies to mitigate rising temperatures impacts calling for more engagement with engineers and entrepreneurs in Scotland to contribute and collaborate with Bangladesh to find solutions such as building houses on stilts, floating boats and looking at alternative solutions to build different accommodations.
- Guests raised concerns regarding climate justice – with Bangladesh having the lowest carbon footprint yet is one of the most affected country in the world by climate change and is being asked to stop develop to mitigate climate impacts.
- An attendee invited members to Aberdeen to see the work there that could be emulated in Bangladesh such as coastal defences, big harbour, waste energy schemes etc.

- AHC confirmed a project in Sylhet and Manchester Council in the works to establish an incineration project.
- Land declaration issue raised where Bangladesh has reclaimed sizeable amounts of land, aiming to make soil structures stable. The AHC confirmed that the Bangladeshi Government is looking to increase size of islets to make them habitable and be occupied by climate refugees.
- Tourism was discussed at length and the AHC answered questions from attendees:
 - The AHC noted that Bangladesh holds the largest unbroken sandy beach in the world. The Bangladeshi Government is taking tourism initiatives such as creating four international airports to facilitate access to other parts of the country, thus creating greater connectivity.
 - An attendee noted concerns to travel to Bangladesh with family due to security concerns. However, pointed that improvements in infrastructure and better organised tourist board would encourage more visits but raised concerns about the lack of nightlife.
 - An attendee suggested that the process of making tea could be marketed as a major tourist attraction and re-addressed night life is not needed to be popular – alternative creative niches could be invested to make an area attractive to international tourists.
 - The AHC reassured that Bangladesh is completely safe for travelling, safe to invest in and is already in discussion with a national carrier, which could start a shuttle flight to Manchester and then onto Dhaka.
 - The CPG suggested to focus on Travel and Tourism at the next CPG meeting, inviting the High Commission of Bangladesh (London) to make a presentation.
- Impacts of industrialisation on agricultural lands was raised and how farmers are being compensated.
 - AHC replied that in terms of industrialisation, farms are not being touched. Coastal lands are being converted into exclusive economic zones. The national policy is to protect agricultural lands.
- Member of the Bangladeshi community asked whether Bangladesh was envisaging to establish a Representation in Scotland. Criteria will need to be assessed in terms of concentration of people to establish a Consulate post in Scotland.

Concluding points

- Mr. Kazi Ziaul Hasan, Assistant High Commissioner of Bangladesh (Manchester) thanked Foysof Choudhury MSP for his active interest and engagement, noting that he is enterprising and an asset to strengthen ties with the Bangladeshi government and Bangladeshi community of Scotland to facilitate engagements on different fronts.
- Foysof Choudhury MSP wrapped up session with thanks to attendees and a big thanks to the Assistant High Commissioner and High Commission's distinguished works and efforts at strengthening bilateral relations. Re-emphasising his commitment to work with governments of Scotland, UK and Bangladesh to build bridges and focus on the positive.

Agenda item 5

- Date and Time of Next Meeting to be confirmed.