



# Activity Report 2020-21

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JUNE 15, 2021

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# AIBS

American Institute of Bangladesh Studies

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# AIBS At a Glance:

The American Institute of Bangladesh Studies (AIBS) is a consortium of institutions of higher learning in the United States aimed at promoting scholarly understanding between Bangladesh and the United States. This is the only umbrella organization in the United States that brings together universities working on and about Bangladesh. Currently, 25 universities are members of the AIBS, including the University of Chicago, Cornell University, University of Texas at Austin, Johns Hopkins University, Columbia University, and University of California-Berkeley. AIBS has also signed memorandums of understanding for cooperation with several Bangladeshi universities, including Dhaka University, BRAC, IUB, Chittagong University, ULAB, and NSU. AIBS is a member of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC). CAORC is a private not-for-profit federation of 22 independent overseas research centers that promote advanced research, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, with a focus on the conservation and recording of cultural heritage and the understanding and interpretation of modern societies. CAORC fosters research projects across national boundaries, encourages collaborative research and programmatic and administrative coherence among member centers, and works to expand their resource base and service capacity. The governing body of the AIBS consists of a board of trustees and the executive committee (EC). Each member institution has a representative on the board of trustees. The executive committee consists of president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, and an at-large member.

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Dhaka Bangladesh 1000

Front and back cover photo courtesy: Sudeepto Salam

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## AIBS Activities in 2020-2021

Due to the global pandemic the year 2020-2021 was a challenging year for the AIBS, however we have continued our work to promote Bangladesh Studies within the United States and around the world. Key events organized by the AIBS was launching a series of webinar to celebrate the golden jubilee of Bangladesh. As part of the series, we organized two webinars on March 29 and April 29.

The key flagship program of the AIBS is the fellowship. Through competitive conference travel grants, AIBS increases the breadth of Bangladesh Studies by supporting academic presentations at scholarly conferences. Since 2011, AIBS has supported 22 scholars on the conference travel grant program (17 U.S. scholars and seven Bangladeshi scholars) to present papers at conferences in the United States. These grants also increase the presence of scholars who do research on Bangladesh at the Annual Conference on South Asia and other Asian Studies academic conferences. In 2019 AIBS co-sponsored a three-day traveling conference focused on the Rohingya Crisis and the implications for Bangladesh. The conference took place in three locations: UC-Berkeley, New York University, and a final roundtable in Washington, D.C. Panel themes of the conference were: gender violence in camps, the role of the NGO / development sector, and the environmental impact of the Rohingya Crisis. AIBS invited scholars from the East and West Coast of the U.S., as well as from Bangladesh to present papers and facilitate panels. In 2019, the AIBS awarded four fellowships and two research and presentation subsidies (travel grants) Due to the global pandemic the fellows have to defer their trips. These research trips is expected to take place in the coming months as Covid-19 situation is improving. The fellowship committee has selected 4 fellows to be awarded the fellowships for the current years. We have also awarded a separate fellowship to a Bangladeshi scholar to be visiting University of Pennsylvania to work with a professor.

The AIBS, along with other activities, have redesigned it website and relaunched on the Bengali New year. This user-friendly website includes information about the AIBS and has a photo gallery of Bangladesh which offer glimpses of the diverse and vibrant Bangladesh. The website continues to attract large number of hits.

Despite the hardship imposed by the pandemic, we have continued to provide support to the scholars in Bangladesh and in the United States. We have maintained the office in Bangladesh, through the finding available for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Bangladesh. The Senior Advisor to the AIBS Bangladesh office, Professor Rabiul Islam and an office assistant have maintained the office and offered services to the Bangladeshi scholars.

# Bangladesh at 50: Achievements and Challenges of Bangladesh Economy

**Event type:** Online Symposium

**Date:** Monday, March 29, 2021

**Sponsors:** The American Institute of Bangladesh Studies (AIBS), Subir & Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies, and the Institute for South Asia Studies

AIBS co-organized an online symposium on March 29 that highlighted the economic achievements of the past 50 years. Participants of the webinar were Dr. Fahmida Khatun (Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka); Dr. Mushfiq Mobarak (Professor of Economics, Yale University); Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, (Economist and social thinker); and Anu Muhammad (Professor of Economics, Jahangirnagar University). The session was moderated by Dr, Farida Khan (Professor, Chair Department of Economics, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs). Remarks were made by Dr, Ali Riaz, (Distinguished Professor, Department of Politics and Government, Illinois State University; President, American Institute of Bangladesh Studies and Dr, Sanchita B. Saxena (Executive Director, Institute for South Asia Studies; Director, Subir and Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies). The Bangladesh Center cosponsored the online event that was viewed live by more than 140 people from Bangladesh, Canada, France, Germany, India, Japan, Malaysia, Sweden, and the US. The recorded video has been made accessible for public.



				
<b>FARIDA KHAN</b> Professor & Chair Dept of Economics, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs	<b>MUSHFIQ MOBARAK</b> Professor of Economics, Yale University	<b>FAHMIDA KHATUN,</b> Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka	<b>HOSSAIN ZILLUR</b> Economist and social thinker. University	<b>ANU MUHAMMAD</b> Professor of Economics, Jahangirnagar University

**BANGLADESH at 50:**  
Achievements and Challenges of Bangladesh's Economy





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# Bangladesh at 50: The Transformation of Culture

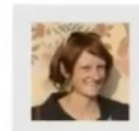
**Event type:** Online Symposium

**Date:** Thursday, April 29, 2021

**Sponsors:** The American Institute of Bangladesh Studies (AIBS), Subir & Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies, and the Institute for South Asia Studies

The second webinar addressed the transformation of culture and was participated by Dr. Habibul Khondker (Professor of Social Sciences, Zayed University, Abu Dhabi); Tausif Noor, (a Ph.D. Student, Art History, UC Berkeley); Dr. Anis Rahman, (Assistant Teaching Professor in technology and global media stream in the Department of Communication at the University of Washington, Seattle); Dr. Lotte Hoek (Senior Lecturer, Social Anthropology, School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh); and Dr. Seuty Sabur

(Associate Professor, Department of Economics and Social Sciences, BRAC University). The session was moderated by Dr. Dina M Siddiqi, (Clinical Associate Professor, Global Liberal Studies, New York University and Secretary of the AIBS Executive Committee). Remarks were made by Dr. Ali Riaz, and Dr. Sanchita B. Saxena. These webinars were well attended. For example, about 200 people registered for the second webinar. While the bulk of our audience came from Bangladesh and the US, we also had many people join in from Australia, Canada, China, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, Japan, Pakistan, Portugal, Sweden, UAE, and the UK. The webinars were livestreamed on FB and archived at the Bangladesh Center site. The series will be continued in Fall semester (September-December 2021) with various other topics.



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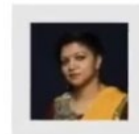
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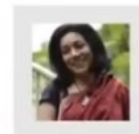
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BANGLADESH AT 50  
THE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURE



THE SUBIR & MALINI  
CHOWDHURY CENTER  
FOR BANGLADESH  
STUDIES  
AT UC BERKELEY



INSTITUTE for  
SOUTH ASIA  
STUDIES  
UC Berkeley

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# Beyond the Crisis Narrative: Rohingya Statelessness and its implications for Bangladesh

**Event type:** Conference

**Date:** February 7, 2020

**Location:** University of California, Berkeley

**Sponsors:** The American Institute of Bangladesh Studies (AIBS), The Subir and Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies, Institute for South Asia Studies, Center of American Overseas Research Centers, Center for Initiative on Political Conflict, Gender and People's Rights Race and Gender, Center for Southeast Asia Studies, Blum Center for Developing Economies, Human Rights Center, 1947 Partition Archive, Department of Gender and Women's Studies

**Speakers:** Samira Siddique, PhD Student | Energy & Resources Group; Rohini J. Haar, Lecturer of Epidemiology, School of Public Health, UC Berkeley; Research Fellow, Human Rights Center, School of Law, UC Berkeley; Ruhul Abid, Associate Professor, Brown University Medical School; Christopher LeBoa, Researcher, Department of Epidemiology, Stanford University; Steve Ross, Senior Advisor and Program Director at the Richardson Center for Global Engagement; Shireen Huq, Founder Narippokho; Rahima Begum, Co-director, Restless Beings; Prashanta Tripura, Professor, BRAC University; Yasmin Ullah, Research Coordinator, Rohingya Human Rights Network; Ashley Toombs, Director of External Affairs, BRAC USA; Sharif Mukul, Research Fellow, Tropical Forests and People Research Centre, University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia; Mabrur Ahmed, Director, Restless Beings; Ali Riaz, Distinguished Professor at the Department of Politics and Government at Illinois State University; Richard Spees, Executive Director, CAORC; Patrick DeSutter, PhD Student, Anthropology, UC Berkeley; Navine Murshid, Associate Professor of Political Science, Colgate University

**Moderators:** Lawrence Cohen, Professor of Anthropology, UC Berkeley; Khatharya Um, Associate Professor, Asian American and Asian Diaspora Studies, UC Berkeley; Isha Ray, Associate Professor, Energy and Resources Group; Co-Director, Berkeley Water Center, UC Berkeley; Dina Siddiqi, Clinical Associate Professor, NYU

# Rohingya—Beyond the Crisis Narrative: Statelessness and its implications for Myanmar and Bangladesh

**Event type:** Panel Discussion

**Date:** February 10, 2020

**Location:** Washington, DC

**Sponsors:** The American Institute of Bangladesh Studies (AIBS), The Subir and Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies, Institute for South Asia Studies, and Center of American Overseas Research Centers

## Panelists:

Sanchita Saxena, Subir and  
Malini Chowdhury Center for  
Bangladesh Studies, UC  
Berkeley

Ali Riaz, Political Science,  
Illinois State University

Shireen Huq, Narippokho  
Rahima Begum, Restless  
Beings

Prashanta Tripura, Aparajita  
Yasmin Ullah, Rohingya Human  
Rights Network

Samira Siddique, Energy and  
Resources Group, UC Berkeley  
Mabrur Ahmed, Restless  
Beings



Rohingya refugees walk towards the Balukhali refugee camp after crossing the border in Bangladesh's Ukhia district, on November 2, 2017. Photo: Dibyangshu Sarkar/ AFP

## Rohingya--Beyond the Crisis Narrative Statelessness and the Implications for Myanmar and Bangladesh

Monday, February 10, 2020  
10:00am -12:00pm  
(light pastries available at 9:30)

2359 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C.



THE SUBIR & MALINI  
CHOWDHURY CENTER  
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STUDIES  
AT UC BERKELEY





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## AIBS Fellowships 2020-2021 (U.S. Citizens)



Fellow Name: Daniel Ng

Fellowship Type: Junior Fellow

Institution: University of Texas at Austin

Project Title: Rehabilitating the Hijra: Nation-State, Development, and the (Bio)Politics of Gender in Bangladesh

Duration: 6 months

### **Abstract**

My dissertation research investigates various efforts to “rehabilitate” the hijra in the aftermath of third gender recognition in contemporary Bangladesh. In this ethnographic study I ask three interrelated questions: 1) How do development actors in Bangladesh (e.g. government bureaucrats and NGO workers) variously understand hijraness and imagine the ideal hijra citizen; 2) How are projects to mainstream and “rehabilitate” the hijra designed and implemented in Dhaka, the largest urban center in Bangladesh where hijras are locally known to reside; and 3) How do hijras themselves understand, negotiate, and experience these development projects on the ground as well as construct alternative possibilities for their future? Through twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork in Dhaka, I will explore how hijra “rehabilitation” is reconfiguring (trans)national debates about queer subjectivity, modernity, and national belonging. I situate my research within broader histories of development, gender and sexuality, and difference in Bangladesh as well as within contemporary transnational circulations of HIV/AIDS-prevention funding and LGBTQ activism for politico-legal inclusion and human rights. By examining how hijra “rehabilitation” is conceptualized and enacted in Bangladesh today, this study shines a light on the ways in which queer precarity is being differently imagined and experienced in Muslim South Asia.



Fellow Name: Mary Shenk

Fellowship Type: Senior Fellow

Institution: Penn State University

Project Title: The Demographic Impacts of Partition: A Comparative Study of Fertility Decline in Bangladesh and West Bengal

Duration: 9 months

### **Abstract**

The partition of Bengal, and subsequent partition of India, created what social scientists sometimes refer to as a ‘natural experiment’ in which language, cultural norms, and deeper history remain shared but recent history diverged in terms of politics, economic development, and public policy. A key demographic consequence was to create a divergence in the patterns of change in fertility (family size) between the regions of West Bengal, India and the nation of Bangladesh. Building on my previous work on fertility in Bangladesh using statistical methods designed to compare across theories, I propose to expand this approach to a regional scale, collecting matching survey datasets from West Bengal and Bangladesh and using them to compare across factors that vary between regions: pace and process of economic development, health and mortality rates, contraceptive access and prevalence, religion and religiosity, and sex ratios and son preference. For this AIBS Fellowship I propose to spend 9 months in West Bengal overseeing data collection in the Birbhum HDSS site, conducting archival research, and working with local researchers—if travel to Bangladesh is possible, I will split my time between West Bengal and Bangladesh. Collaboration will continue after the end of the fellowship and the project will produce a series of journal articles and a durable collaboration between demographers at the Institute for Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK), the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research (icddr,b) in Bangladesh, and my home institution of Pennsylvania State University.



Fellow Name: Mahmud Khan

Fellowship Type: Senior Fellow

Institution: University of Georgia

Project Title: Improving nutritional status of children in Bangladesh: policy options based on “exceptional” nutritional outcomes at two ends of wealth score distribution of households.

Duration: 2.5 months

### **Abstract**

Despite impressive economic progress, child undernutrition remains high in many developing regions. The societal cost of child stunting is high with adverse effects on long-run economic growth. Reduction of stunting will improve population health, quality of life and economic growth. In 2018, 20% of children in the top two socioeconomic quintiles were stunted in Bangladesh while among the two lowest quintiles, about 60% of children were not stunted. To identify mechanisms for reducing stunting quickly, it is important to analyze the “exceptional” outcomes at two ends of distribution of households by socioeconomic status. The purpose of the study is to identify factors and behavioral patterns that allow relatively poor households to prevent stunting among under-5 children while failure of richer households to avert stunting. The objectives of the study are: to identify factors affecting the likelihood of a child not being stunted in households with low socioeconomic status; to identify factors that increase the likelihood of stunting in high socioeconomic status households. Study objectives will be achieved through secondary data analysis of DHS or MICS data set and a qualitative survey. Findings from secondary data analysis will be supplemented with the results of qualitative survey of mothers/caretakers of stunted children. This research will propose specific policies and interventions for lowering prevalence of stunting, given the socioeconomic status of households.



Fellow Name: Mohammad Kabir Hassan

Fellowship Type: Senior Fellow

Institution: University of New Orleans

Project Title: Prospect of Agent Banking for Post-Pandemic Recovery in Bangladesh

Duration: 3 months

### **Abstract**

Agent banking has proven to be a catalyst for financial inclusion in emerging markets. In the Asian and African region, agent banking allows a large portion of the unbanked population to receive much needed financial services. Bangladesh Bank, the Central bank of Bangladesh, recognizes the importance of agent banking and approved this service in 2013. However, evidence on the ability of agent banking to serve the underprivileged is limited. Therefore, we propose to undertake this study to explore various dimensions of agent banking in the context of Bangladesh. We plan to use a quantitative research design and analyze secondary data using time series and plan data models. Results provided by this research will be valuable for regulators, bank management and rural entrepreneurs. Our research will be the first to provide empirical evidence on the determinants and outcomes of agent banking for emerging markets.



Fellow Name: David Eaton

Fellowship Type: Senior Fellow

Institution: University of Texas, Austin

Project Title: Evaluation of Health Empowerment for Rohingya Refugees of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Duration: 2 months

### **Abstract**

Preventive health risks undermine Rohingya refugees' quality of life in Bangladesh. This project, involving a team of University of Texas at Austin undergraduates and faculty members, is preparing a series of documentary videos in the Rohingya dialect on preventive health issues that can be distributed to refugees through cell telephones in the refugee camps. This project is documenting the preventive health content, creating the health promotion videos, and working with Bangladeshi foundations as well as a faculty member and graduate students from Chittagong University to distribute the videos via cell phones in the camps. The team will evaluate health outcomes for those refugees with access to the information versus those without access. This proposal seeks funding for travel, lodging and meals for two months for the lead US faculty member who coordinates the project with the other members of the team and other institutions. Other project expenses are paid for by other sources of funds.



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## AIBS Fellowship 2020-2021 (Bangladesh Citizens)



Fellow Name: Ananna Zulfiqar Showly

Fellowship Type: Travel Fellowship

Institution: Jahangirnagar University,  
Bangladesh

Host Institution: University of  
Pennsylvania

Project Title: Paleoecology of the  
Northwestern part of Bangladesh in the  
Late Holocene (4000 BP) through  
palynological analyses and interpretations

### Abstract

In last few years, excavations have been conducted in several archaeological sites at various parts of Bangladesh by the researchers from Department of Archaeology, Jahangirnagar University and Department of Archaeology, Ministry of Culture, People's Republic of Bangladesh, which provided reliable archaeological stratigraphies. I am a member of this research team. Many soil and sediment samples have been collected with precise stratigraphic locations from these archaeological sites. Samples for pollen analyses have also been obtained from those areas. As per my research interest, I want to investigate those pollen samples to explore the past economic (Cultivated/Non-cultivated) plants of the region by making a pollen diagram and identifying the different pollen spectra from human-modified environments. At present, we have very limited lab facility to study the pollens in detail in our department. Moreover, having limited subject matter expert in the area, I was looking for an opportunity to carry out further steps of analyzing the pollen samples under the guidance of an expert in a laboratory with state-of-art technology. During my visit, I will work at the Penn Paleoecology Lab under the direct supervision of Professor Kathleen Morrison and learn the methodologies and techniques used in analyzing pollen samples collected from Bangladesh. I would like to develop the methodologies and analytical framework for my research as mentioned earlier.

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Winona State University  
Yale University

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Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU)

BGMEA University of Fashion and Technology (BUFT)

BRAC University (BRACU)

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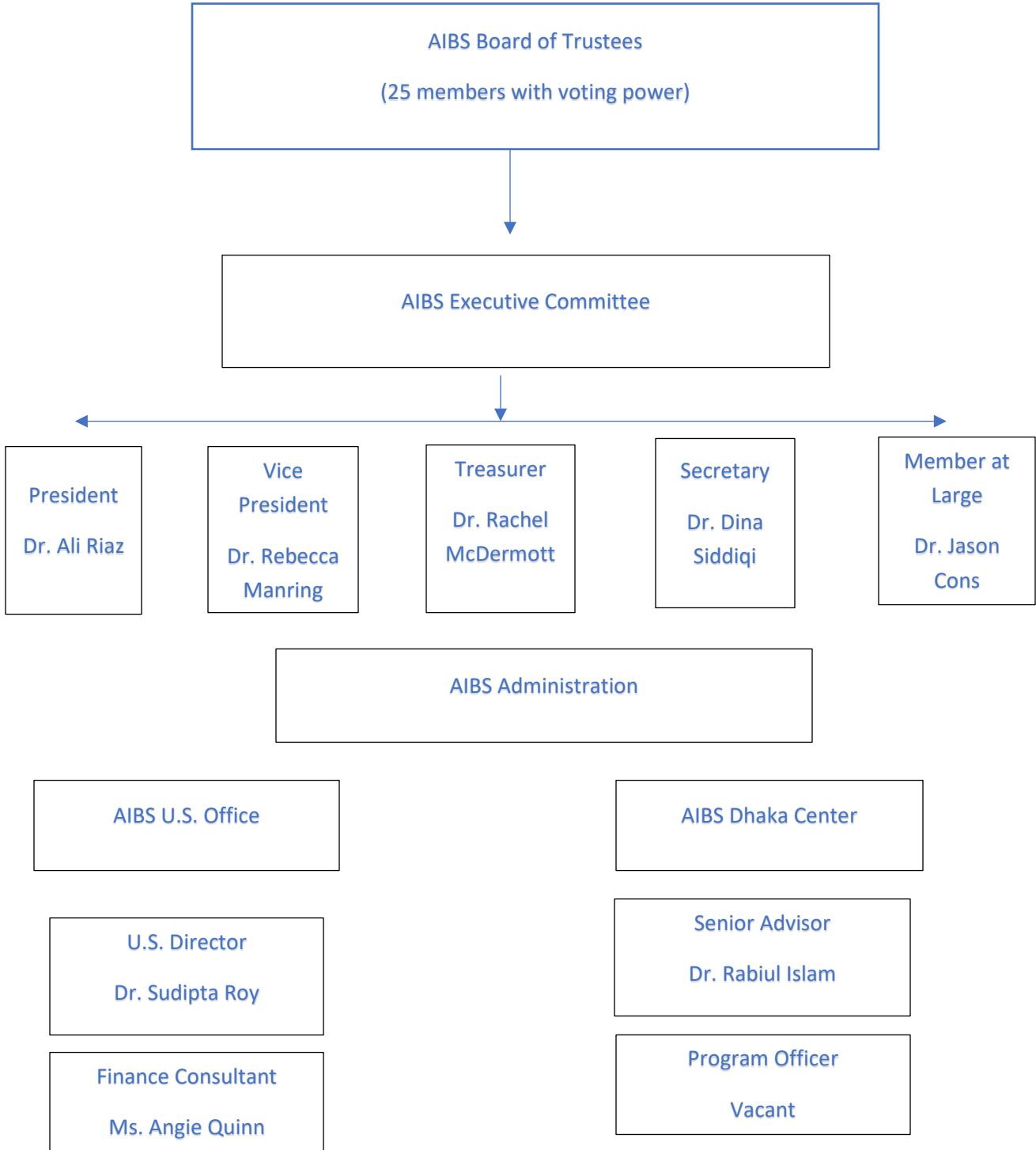
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Professor, Institute of Social Welfare and Research (ISWR)  
University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh  
rabiuledubd@gmail.com

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Spring, Maryland, USA 20910

## Organogram





**THANK YOU**