

Report on the conference:

**BANGLADESH: A CRITICAL RETROSPECTION OF THE PAST
AND FORETHOUGHT OF THE FUTURE**

Jointly organized by:

American Institute of Bangladesh Studies (AIBS)

&

South Asia Institute, University of Texas, Austin

Venue: South Asian Institute, University of Texas, Austin

Date: November 4-5, 2022.

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INTRODUCTION

The American Institute of Bangladesh Studies (AIBS), in collaboration with the South Asia Institute at the University of Texas at Austin, organized a two-day-long conference on Bangladesh, focusing on the country's past fifty years and the ways forward. The conference was held in a hybrid format, between November 4 and 5, 2022, at the University of Texas at Austin. It brought together leading Bangladesh scholars, students, and professionals, primarily based in the United States, for panels and presentations. Professor Ali Riaz, President of AIBS and Professor Sharmila Rudrappa, Director, South Asia Institute, University of Texas at Austin, inaugurated the conference. Naila Kabeer, Professor of Gender and Development at the London School of Economics and Political Science presented the keynote paper on religion and gender equality in the context of Bangladesh on the second day of the conference.

During the conference, 24 papers were presented in eight different panels, that focused on politics, social movements, political conflict, climate change, gender, labor, education, digital space, identity and immigration, and urban development. Sixteen authors presented their papers in person and eight joined online over Zoom. Online presenters cited long delay in getting a visa for their absence. At least 64 people attended the conference in person including the paper presenters.

Eight esteemed Bangladesh scholars chaired the panels at the conference including Neil DeVotta, Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Wake Forest University; Rebecca J. Manring, Professor of India Studies and Religious Studies, Indiana University at Bloomington; Jason Cons, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of Texas at Austin; Erin Lentz, associate professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin; Kamran Asdar Ali, professor of anthropology, University of Texas at Austin; Rachel M. McDermott, professor of Asian and Middle Eastern cultures, Barnard College; Ahmed Shamim, University of Texas at Austin; and Sharmila Rudrappa, Director, South Asia Institute, University of Texas at Austin.

A post-conference survey revealed that most of the responders attended the conference for professional development opportunities and other career aspects such as networking. Ninety three percent respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the conference fulfilled their expectations. In open-ended feedback, participants expected the continuity of the conference. Other feedback includes expansion of the scope of the conference, ensure adequate time to international participants to process visa, and more publicity about the conference (see annex 4 for more details).

The following sections illustrate the details of all panels and the summary of 24 individual papers presented in the conference. Pictures from the question-and-answer sessions and cultural and social events are annexed (annex 1 and 2).

DAY 1: NOVEMBER 4, 2022



WELCOME

Professor Sharmila Rudrappa, Director, South Asia Institute, University of Texas at Austin [left], and Professor Ali Riaz, President, American Institute of Bangladesh Studies [right] inaugurated the conference by welcoming the participants and the presenters. They then introduced the keynote speaker of the conference Professor Naila Kabeer and other distinguished

scholars, who would chair the panels. Finally, Prof. Rudrappa and Prof. Riaz presented outlines of the session plans and logistics.

PANEL 1: PROTEST, POLITICS AND CONFLICT



The first panel of the conference dealt with different aspects of protest, politics, and conflicts in Bangladesh. Five papers were presented in the panel. Dr Neil DeVotta, Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Wake Forest University [first from the right], chaired the panel.

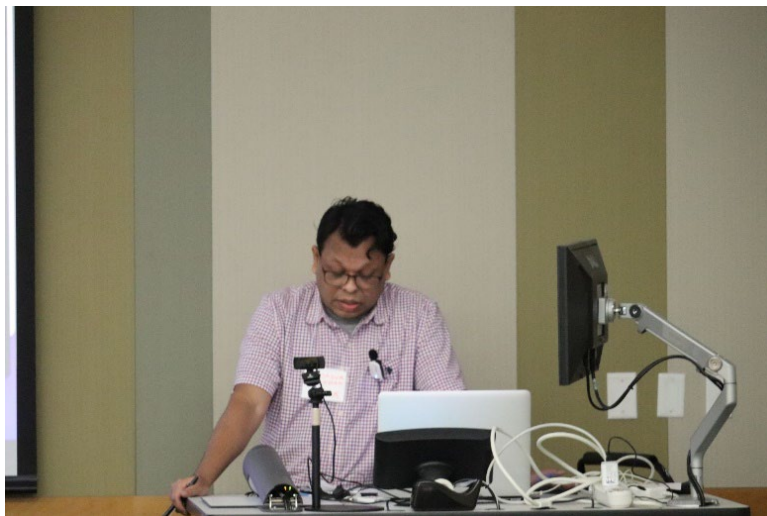
Panel 1: Paper 1: Priyanka Kundu, Graduate Student, University of Illinois at Chicago, USA, presented the first paper of the panel, titled *Social Media Hate Speech in Political Communication: A Critical Analysis of Bangladesh*.



Summary: Hate speech in social media, including in the political communication, has become a common phenomenon across the world. Bangladesh is no exception. In recent decades, incidents of many hate crimes took place across the country. Even the social media contents of major political parties contain hate speeches. Using discourse analysis method, the author Priyanka Kundu examines how three major political parties of Bangladesh—Awami League, BNP and

Jatiya Party—use hate speech in their social media platforms Facebook and YouTube. Priyanka adopted the Anti-Defamation League's (AdI) Pyramid of Hate concept in analyzing contents and found that most political contents analyzed in this study reached the two highest levels of the hate pyramid, biased attitudes, and act of bias.

Panel 1: Paper 2: Mohammad Sajjadur Rahman, Graduate Student, Clark University, USA, presented the second paper of the panel, titled *The Politics of General Amnesty in Bangladesh*.



Summary: In January 1972, the then Bangladesh government enacted the “Collaborators Act” to try thousands of anti-liberation elements who opposed the country’s liberation war in 1971. In addition to criminalizing wartime collaboration, the Act also intended to contain postwar violence through legal mechanisms. However, within just two years of the beginning of the trial process, in 1973, the government declared a general amnesty for most of the alleged collaborators, leading to political

controversies. Using archival materials and memoirs, the author Mohammad Sajjadur Rahman argues that while the decision to forgive was propagated as an act of magnanimity of the ruling party leader, the process that led to that decision was much more complex and demands closer scrutiny. The author finds that both internal and external factors contributed to the decision of general amnesty.

Panel 1: Paper 3: Dr. Julian Kuttig, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Ghent University, Belgium, presented the third paper of panel one, titled *Mujib's Two Bodies: Memorial Populism and Enforced Amnesia in Bangladesh*.



Summary: There has been a growing scholarship in recent years on the ruling Awami League's performative memorial reproduction of "its" independence struggle. Based on long-term ethnographic research and critical discourse analysis of speeches and (pop)-cultural artefacts and inspired by Kantorowicz's (1957) distinction between the body natural and the body politic, the author Julian Kuttig examines how Awami League constructs a populist historicity around the 1971 Liberation War and

its independence leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman thus forms its ideological foundation to legitimize its current authoritarian regime.

Panel 1: Paper 4: Nafisa Tanjeem, Associate Professor, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, Worcester State University, USA, presented the fourth paper of the panel, titled *The 2018 Road Safety Protest in Bangladesh: How A Student Crowd Challenged (or Could Not Challenge) the Repressive State*.



Summary: In 2018, in the aftermath of a fatal traffic accident that killed two school students, Bangladesh was raged by a massive social movement around road safety issues. The spontaneity of the mass student participation in the movement unsettled the seat of power—an authoritarian regime. Drawing on the historical tradition of student engagement in political and social movements, the author Nafisa Tanjeem explores how “the accident” can turn into a gateway for embodied

political engagement of young people. The study illustrates how a student movement can disrupt a repressive regime and how a repressive regime surveils, regulates, and dissipates the student crowd. Third, it unravels how the student crowd on the streets is co-constituted by its virtual embodiment in digital organizing spaces and how both the student crowd and the virtual crowd experience and negotiate state surveillance and state violence.

Panel 1: Paper 5: Rokeya Aktar of University of Bath, UK, presented the fifth and the final paper of panel one, titled *The Political Economy of Conflict over the Farakka Barrage*.



Summary: Farakka Barrage over the river of Ganges that flows between India and Bangladesh has been a point of discord between the two countries for more than half a century. The barrage has caused serious economic damage and loss in the south-western part of Bangladesh. India's reluctance to ensure fair share of the water of an international river to a downstream country has been violation of international law and harmed its relationship with Bangladesh.

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the author Rokeya Aktar investigates as to what motivates the Indian approach to water sharing of Ganges River and what guides the conflict between the two countries over the barrage. Rokeya's study suggests that India's policy over sharing of Ganges River water with Bangladesh is hegemonic and driven by political choice—the proportion of water shared changes with the change of political leadership in Bangladesh and with the nature of the relationship between the two countries.

PANEL 2: SPORTS, TELEVISION, FILM: THE POLITICS AND BEYOND



The second panel of the day discussed two papers concerning politics of entertainment media in Bangladesh. Dr. Rebecca J. Manring, Associate Professor of India Studies and Religious Studies, Indiana University at Bloomington, USA, chaired the panel.

Panel 2: Paper 1: Dr. Fahmidul Haq, Visiting Professor, Bard College Bard College, USA [on the right]; and Dr. Anis Rahman, Assistant Teaching Professor, University of Washington, Seattle [on the left], presented the first paper of panel two, titled *Going Global: A Survival Strategy for the New Bangladeshi Cinema*.



Summary: The global film production studies are primarily dominated by core and semi-peripheral industrial perspectives. Fahmidul Haq and Anis Rahman's study offers a history of Bangladeshi films in the global stage from a peripheral point of view. Despite a shrinking domestic market and political pressures for narrative control, several Bangladeshi films are receiving international recognition and diaspora support. The authors argue that this recognition should be seen not necessarily as a

governmental soft power of Bangladeshi film culture abroad but as a survival strategy of young filmmakers in a troubled cultural industry.

Panel 2: Paper 2: Md. Saidur Rahman, Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, University of Toronto, Canada, presented the second paper of panel two, titled *Conquering the Master's Game: The Decolonization of Cricket in Bangladesh*.



Summary: Cricket, despite its colonial connection, practices, and values, became very popular in the colonies and continues to dominate contemporary South Asia's sporting culture. In the postcolonial period, the sport survived in the South Asian countries due to the continued approval of the new ruling elites. The author Saidur Rahman argues that cricket in the Indian Subcontinent transformed and indigenized through the reproduction and reinvention through everyday practice and

performance, destabilizing many colonial aspects of the game. By applying different decolonial concepts and analyzing cricketing practices, the author explores how cricket's decolonization is happening in Bangladesh.

PANEL 3: CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES



The third panel of the day one presented two papers on climate change and its consequences in Bangladesh. Dr. Jason Cons, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of Texas at Austin, chaired the panel.

Panel 3: Paper 1: Monir Hussain, Blazer Graduate Research Fellow, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, USA, presented the first paper of the panel, titled *Revisiting Child Health in The Face Of Climate Change: A Study About The Effects of Temperature Rise and Precipitation Changes on Child Health in Bangladesh*.



Summary: Despite being a food-sufficient country, Bangladesh still suffers from food insecurity and undernutrition. Monir Hussain's study examines the relationship between agricultural practices as social norms and food security, and how they impact sociodemographic factors and climate change. Using data from the 2012 Bangladesh Integrated Household Survey (BIHS) and linear regression models, the study shows how agricultural practices are strongly associated with different

sociodemographic factors (land ownership, religion, gender, education, and occupation) that subsequently affects the status of food security in Bangladesh. The findings indicate that socioeconomic statuses are significant predictors of agricultural practices.

Panel 3: Paper 2: Riva Das Gupta of University of Chittagong, Bangladesh, presented the second paper of panel three, titled *Environmental Degradation in Bangladesh: The Impacts of Foreign Direct Investment, Output Volatility, Energy Consumption and Housing*.



Summary: The paper examines the impact of foreign direct investment and output volatility on environmental degradation in Bangladesh. Employing a multivariate time series framework and using 50 years annual time series data from 1971 to 2021, the author developed an autoregressive distributed lagged model to regress environmental degradation on foreign direct investment and output volatility controlling for energy consumption, and housing data.

PANEL 4: WOMEN, LABOR AND EVERYDAY LIFE



Panel four of day one presented three papers on women and labor relations in Bangladesh. Dr. Erin Lentz, associate professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin, chaired the panel.

Panel 4: Paper 1: Sibbir Ahmed, on behalf of Rahnuma Siddika, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA, presented the first paper of the panel titled *CSR Failures in Bangladeshi Apparel Industry: An Agency Theory Perspective*.



Summary: The apparel industry's complex global supply chain makes it difficult to monitor the Corporate Social Responsibility practices in the upstream firms. In recent years, the customers' sensitivity towards environmental, social, and workers' safety has increased. In the last decade, several cases of apparel industry CSR failures in Bangladesh attracted global attention. Rahnuma Siddika explores why the CSR practices in the fashion industry's global supply chain are susceptible to

implementation failures, particularly in the Bangladeshi manufacturing industry, and how these failures could be mitigated. The findings suggest that CSR failures at the supply chain negatively affect reputation of the fashion brands in the downstream. It also finds that information asymmetry and goal conflicts among the contracting parties (principal and agent) lead to adverse selection, moral hazard, and hold-up problems in maintaining a standard CSR practice.

Panel 4: Paper 2: Marshall Azad McCollum of the University of Washington, USA, presented second paper of panel four, titled *A Household in Crisis: The Predicament of Live-In Domestic Workers Caring for Aging Employers*.

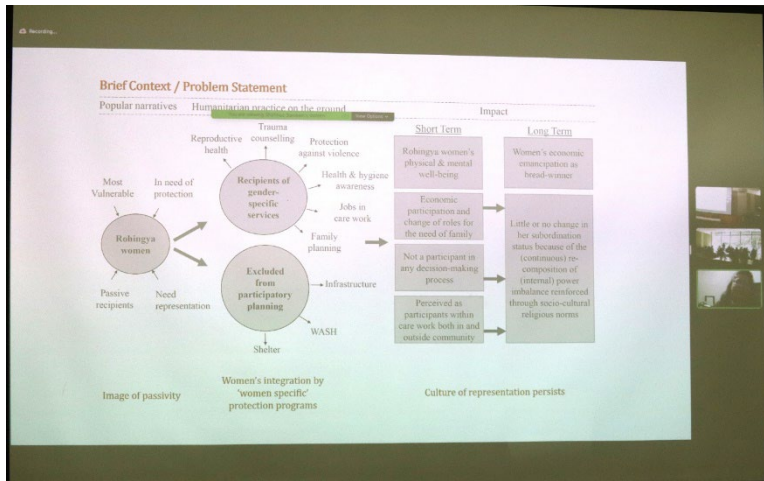


Summary: The study concerns about domestic labor, elder care and social reproduction in Bangladesh, and the ways in which the care labor of working-class women becomes a site of middle-class formation. Using an auto-ethnography of care, and expanding on social reproduction theory, Marshall Azad draws on his experience as a Bangladeshi American of navigating systems of elder care in Dhaka and investigates the ways in which global crises of care and migration manifest in many

Bangladeshi homes. His findings suggest that female domestic workers who are confined to the household are particularly vulnerable as their employers age, and that the pressures of the crisis of care,

which are experienced constantly by the poor, begin to ripple out into the middle-class under these circumstances.

Panel 4: Paper 3: Shafinaz Sameen, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Architecture, Military Institute of Science and Technology, Bangladesh, virtually presented the third paper of panel four, titled *Refugee Women’s Agency: The Invisible Participation of Rohingya Women in Everyday Life-Making in the Camps of Bangladesh*.



Summary: In the ongoing humanitarian operations in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, the refugee women are integrated more as ‘recipients’ than actors. The study is a testimony to Rohingya women’s everyday meaningful actions to uphold their agency and advocate inclusion by voice. The study engages a framework of intersectionality and an interpretive understanding of the relation between women’s on-the-ground experiences and broader

power structure investigated through ethnography and focus group discussions. The study finds that not only women are fulfilling the (consumption) gaps of everyday restricted camp life for the Rohingya community besides their domestic roles but also their certain micro-practices are enabling them to accommodate their individual needs within the norms as well as spaces decided for them.

DAY 2: NOVEMBER 5, 2022

The second day of the conference begun with a keynote paper by renowned scholar of gender and international development Professor Naila Kabeer of London School of Economics. The day then proceeded with four panels covering labor, education, digitization, immigration, and different facets of development and its consequences.

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Dr. Naila Kabeer, Professor of Gender and Development at the Department of International Development, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK, presented her keynote paper titled *Unruly Sons, Compassionate Daughters: Reconfiguring the Inter-Generational Contract in Bangladesh*.



Summary: Since the mid-1980s, Bangladesh has made unexpected social progress, including progress on gender equality, in the face of what were high levels of absolute poverty and very poor-quality governance. This has been dubbed the Bangladesh paradox in the international development literature. What has gone largely unremarked in this literature is that this progress was achieved during a period which has seen the steady and visible rise of an orthodox version of Islam in a country

which enshrined the principle of secularism in its constitution. The paradox here lies not so much in the antithesis posed between gender equality and Islam within the international literature, which tends to brush out the different ways that Islam is practised in different countries, but in the model of gender relations contained within this orthodoxy which is deeply opposed to many of the gains made by women. There have been a large number of studies debating the rise of this orthodoxy in Bangladesh and its implications for women. While it tends to be presented in terms of a binary opposition between secularism and religion, the underlying tensions are in fact much more about what kind of Islam should prevail in Bangladesh. What I want to explore is, first of all, what kind of Islam actually does prevail when we step out of these politicized debates to examine how ordinary people practice their religion and secondly, how can we relate these everyday practices of Islam relate to the broader story of progress on gender equality.

PANEL 5: LABOR AND EDUCATION



Panel five, the first in day two, introduced three papers on different aspects of labor market and education. Dr. Kamran Asdar Ali, Professor of Anthropology, University of Texas at Austin, chaired the panel.

Panel 5: Paper 1: Sibbir Ahmad, Graduate Student, Michigan State University, USA, presented the first paper of panel five, titled *Labor Market Discrimination in Bangladesh: Experimental Evidence from the Job Market of College Graduates*.



Summary: The authors investigate whether labor market discrimination exists in the hiring process of a candidate with a college/graduate degree based on their high school background, gender, and religious attire preference in the Bangladeshi job market. The study employs an experimental audit study approach to explore any systematic bias by an employer in the primary selection process of jobs. Using 3320 fictitious resumes in response to 415 job openings in four sectors- IT, NGO,

Media, and Corporate- advertised on Bangladeshi online job sites, newspapers, or social media pages, the authors have recorded the callback from the employer for the interview/written test and controlled candidates' and employers' characteristics for the analysis. The study finds evidence of discrimination based on candidates' high school background, gender, and religious attire preference. Candidates with madrasah (Islamic school) high school backgrounds receive fewer callbacks than candidates from non-Islamic schools across the industry.

Panel 5: Paper 2: Reshmi Chowdhury and Mehnaaz Momen, Texas A&M International University, USA, presented the second paper of panel five, titled *Building Tolerance through Education Policy: Rethinking Inclusion in the Narratives of “Bangladeshi” Identity*.



Summary: Incidents of harassment and violence against members of the religious and ethnic minorities in Bangladesh are frequently reported in the national news media. A critical examination of the educational curriculum of Bangladesh may help to explore how our education system presents the life and living of the diverse religious and ethnic populations in Bangladesh and how much space is allocated in our formal learning for nurturing critical thinking and empathy building in young

minds. The researchers Reshmi Chowdhury and Mehnaaz Momen analyze particular textbooks (elementary, middle school and high school level) of Social Studies assigned in schools approved by the Bangladesh Textbook Board, to evaluate the content and especially framing of such content to understand how textbooks tackles learnings and practice of minority religions.

Panel 5: Paper 3: Taimur Reza, Graduate Student, University of Chicago, USA, presented the third paper of panel five, titled *Precarious Migrant: Labor, Emotions and Ideology*.



Summary: The study tackles the question of why transnational migrants choose a life of drudgery abroad even though it is not necessary for their subsistence, and what sustains them through the everyday drudgery. By analyzing some contemporary TV dramas, Taimur Reza’s study argues that the narrative logic of these dramas posits a conundrum at the heart of the Bangladeshi migrants in the Gulf. Migrant's drudgery is predicated on fierce moral uprightness, and the

migrant himself is a moral warrior who expends or uses up his own physicality for the futurity of others. Precisely because this self-definition of the migrant presupposes the ratification of his family members, he lives in a constant fear of refusal of recognition. The invariably pessimistic narrative arc of these drama dwells on the ways the migrant's family wields this ratifying authority as a sword against him.

PANEL 6: DIGITAL REALITY



Panel six of the conference offered four papers on digital technologies in the realm of political society. Rachel M. McDermott, Professor of Asian and Middle Eastern Cultures, Barnard College, chaired the panel.

Panel 6: Paper 1: Abu Taib Ahmed, Graduate Student, Colorado State University, USA, presented the first paper of panel six, titled *How Intelligentsia, Media Became Tools of Cultural Hegemony for an Autocracy in Bangladesh*.



Summary: Bangladesh has slipped into an autocracy in recent decades. The regime has significantly restricted universal suffrage, freedom of expression and other fundamental human rights. Bangladesh's intelligentsia and media have been ideological allies of the ruling regime and remained uncritical of the party when the country needed it most. Taib Ahmed seeks to examine how an authoritarian regime exploits media to manufacture consents. Applying Gramscian thoughts of cultural

hegemony and employing textual analysis of selected media content from newspaper articles to video content, the paper explores how Bangladesh's intelligentsia and media generate consents and construct ideological foundations for the authoritarian regime.

Panel 6: Paper 2: Fahmida Zaman, Graduate Student, University of Delaware, USA [second from the right], presented the second paper of panel six, titled *Mechanisms and Motivations of Digital Authoritarianism: The Case of Bangladesh*.



Summary: Hybrid and authoritarian regimes utilize increased access or investment in internet infrastructure as a development marker to seek political legitimacy while attempting to assert political control of the internet by adapting various internet control measures. Bangladesh’s current authoritarian regime’s “Digital Bangladesh” strategy as well as its infamous “Digital Security Act, 2018” are a great example of such development. Placing Bangladesh in a broader context of the rise of political

control of the internet, also described as digital authoritarianism, Fahmida Zaman investigates the mechanisms and motivations of political control of internet in Bangladesh. Using qualitative and quantitative data from Freedom House and Digital Society Project dataset of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), the paper offers a typology of the mechanisms and quantitatively test motivations of digital authoritarianism in the country.

Panel 6: Paper 3: Md. Saimum Parvez, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium, presented the third paper of panel six, titled *The Changing Nature of Bangladeshi Terrorist Organizations and the Role of Digital Media*.

Summary: Many terrorism scholars believe that the Internet is an enabler and driver of radicalization, and it has a significant impact on almost every activity related to terrorism, from disseminating propaganda to recruitment and operational activities. Despite the voluminous literature on online radicalization, the changing nature of the terrorist organizations to adapt to new technologies has been least explored. By analyzing the leadership structure, recruitment procedure, propaganda tactics, and operational activities of four Bangladeshi terrorist organizations, Harkatul Jihad Bangladesh (HuJIB), Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Ansar al Islam (AAI), and Islamic State in Bengal, Md. Saimum Parvez demonstrates how these terrorist outfits have been adapting to new technologies. The study finds that the traditional groups are more structured, centralized, and based in religious educational institutions, while the new generational groups, AAI and IS Bengal, are tech-savvy and have embraced digital media in their various activities.

Panel 6: Paper 4: Mr. Washik Muhammad Ishtiaq Ezaz of Independent University, Bangladesh, presented the fourth paper of panel six, titled *The Downward Spiral Impact of Draconian Legislation*.



Summary: Recent international press freedom indicators suggest that the current regime in Bangladesh is weaponizing laws to regulate independent media. In addition, increasing political usurpation of media industry also restricts the free flow of information and press freedom by imposing self-censorship on media contents. In this context, Washik Muhammod Istiaq Ezaz argues the regime has purposively created a restrictive environment for media through oppressive regulatory

regime and a pervasive culture of impunity. This study analyzed relevant legislative frameworks to examine the question.

PANEL 7: IDENTITY AND IMMIGRATION



The seventh panel of the conference dealt with identity and immigration and presented three papers. Dr. Ahmed Shamim, Assistant Professor of Instruction in the Department of Asian Studies, University of Texas at Austin, chaired the panel.

Panel 7: Paper 1: Md. Khadimul Islam, Graduate Student, Wayne State University, USA, presented the first paper of the panel, titled *Media System of Bangladesh: Slowly Moving in the Direction of Authoritarianism*.



Summary: Many scholars examined the role of media in democracies, especially how it is being manipulated to influence public opinion. In Bangladesh, successive regimes have banned newspapers, shut down television channels, prosecuted journalists, and enacted legislations that hinder press freedom; however, none has succeeded to completely tame the media down. Using the perspective of John Merrill (1990) and drawing on qualitative interviews with journalists, Md. Khadimul Islam

examines the state of media freedom in Bangladesh in the context of the current authoritarian rule. The findings of the study suggest that Bangladesh's media system is neither completely restricted nor fully free. It is however slowly moving towards restrictive system.

Panel 7: Paper 2: Shahanaz Parveen of RUDN University, Russia, presented the second paper of panel seven, titled *The Process of Reunification of Bangladeshi Families Initiated by Women Immigrated to Italy and the UK*.



Summary: Nearly half a million Bangladeshi migrants residing in Italy and the UK—comprising two of the largest diaspora destinations for Bangladeshi citizens abroad. Bangladeshi migrants living in Italy and the UK are often reunited by immigrant men inviting their wives from Bangladesh. Recently, however, many second-generation girls and women have initiated family reunification by marrying Bangladeshi bridegrooms and inviting them to Italy. Shahanaz Parveen studies the

gender problems arising out of such family-reunification procedures initiated by Bangladeshi migrant women to Europe. The author employs a comparative qualitative analysis technique to document the experiences of Bangladeshi families immigrated to Italy and to the United Kingdom.

Panel 7: Paper 3: Sharif Wahab, Graduate Student, Indiana University Bloomington, USA, presented third paper of panel seven, titled *The Interconnected Spaces of Producing Refugeehood of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh*.



Summary: The year 2022 marks the fifth year since the influx of more than 850,000 Rohingyas in Bangladesh began in August 2017. The temporary refugee crisis has been turning into a protracted refugee situation (PRS) for Bangladesh entailing geopolitical complexities and decreasing humanitarian funds. It is important to understand how the government of Bangladesh (GoB) has been re-strategizing its refugee management in these shifting conditions of PRS. Sharif Wahab has conducted a multi-

sited ethnographic study examining how physically distant yet socio-spatially interconnected spaces of the city of Cox's Bazar, Kutupalong camp, and Bhasan Char Island evolve together for managing the displacements of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The study shows that the GoB is adopting a combination of confinement and informality for managing the refugees in multiple spaces and maintaining a permanence of displaceability by aiming at the right to belong and the right to move.

PANEL 8: DEVELOPMENT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES



The last and final panel of the two-day conference was on development and its consequences. Two papers were presented in the panel. Professor Sharmila Rudrappa [right], Director, South Asia Institute, University of Texas at Austin, chaired the panel.

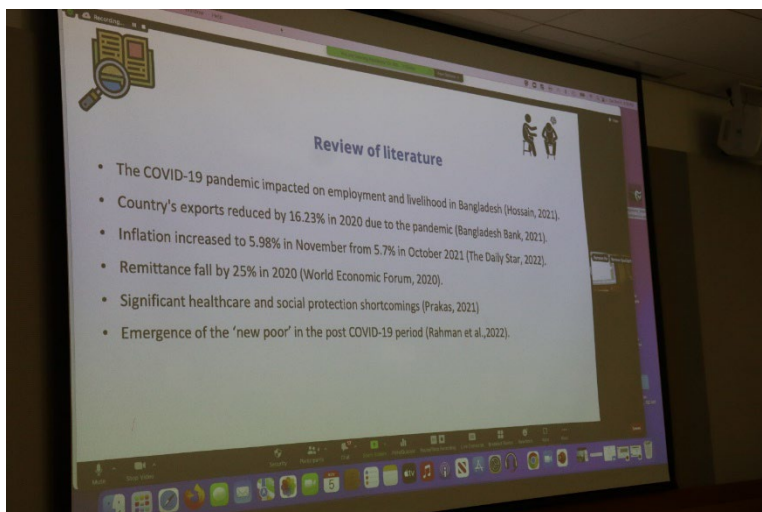
Panel 8: Paper 1: Shehzad Arifeen, Graduate Student, University of Texas at Austin, USA, presented paper one of panel eight, titled *Traffic Nightmares and Infrastructure Dreams: Dhaka, the 'Unliveable' City*.



Summary: Bangladesh's capital city Dhaka's 'liveability' has been under scrutiny of late. The city suffers from crippling congestion and multifaceted governance crisis, while observing multi-billion-dollar construction projects. Research on city 'unliveability' are generally shaped by questions of adequacy and governance. They barely capture the aspects of the distribution of social power and control. Shehzad Arifeen investigates Dhaka's liveability crisis by treating transport infrastructure as a

means of enacting control and ownership over space and wealth. The author utilizes media reports, planning documents and policy reports, and interviews to argue that city infrastructure is not merely a 'public good' – it also constitutes a field and medium for capital accumulation, state-building projects, and counter-hegemonic aspirations.

Panel 8: Paper 2: Md. Ismail Hossain of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Bangladesh; and Md Saiful Islam of University of Alabama, Birmingham, virtually presented their paper titled *Challenges to Development Interventions in Bangladesh: The Aftermath of COVID-19 Outbreaks*.



Summary: The Covid-19 lockdowns have resulted in the cancellation of many development projects in Bangladesh. Besides, as Bangladesh is elevated to the middle-income country status, many development partners have also moved out of the country. Many non-government organizations (NGOs) that depend on development assistances from international partners are hit hard by these twin challenges. Md. Ismail Hossain investigates the challenges encountered by the development

organizations in Bangladesh. Examining twenty development organizations, the study finds that development organizations suffer from financial crisis, administrative corruption, lack of skilled manpower, among others, in post COVID period.

VOTE OF THANKS



After two-days of intense deliberation, discussions, question and answer sessions, and cultural-social interactions of participants and presenters, Professor Sharmila Rudrappa, Director, South Asia Institute, University of Texas at Austin, and Professor Ali Riaz, President, American Institute of Bangladesh Studies concluded the conference with a vote of thanks to all the presenters, participants, and the organizers of the event.

ABOUT ORGANIZERS

AIBS

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 (<https://aibs.net/>). 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. AIBS has also signed memorandums of understanding for cooperation with 25 Bangladeshi universities. 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.

THE SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AUSTIN

With over 60 faculty members in more than 25 schools and departments, the University of Texas at Austin has one of the most distinguished South Asia programs in the country. The South Asia Institute was established as part of a university initiative to promote South Asian programs, especially those pertaining to contemporary issues, across the entire university and in the larger community. As a National Resource Center for South Asia funded by a Title VI grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the institute sponsors major conferences, scholarly symposia and a weekly South Asia Seminar. The institute also provides Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships to students pursuing graduate degrees relating to South Asia in any department or school of the University.

Additionally, the Title VI grant also provides resources for outreach programs to K-12 schools, post-secondary institutions, business and civic organizations, and the Texas community at large. Another central mission of the Institute is to promote the study of contemporary South Asian languages in cooperation with the Department of Asian Studies and the Hindi-Urdu Flagship Program. Bengali, Hindi, Malayalam, Sanskrit, Tamil, and Urdu are currently taught in the department. The South Asia Initiative underscores the University's commitment to making the University of Texas South Asia program one of the best in the country.

The conference is co-sponsored by

LBJ School of Public Affairs, Women's and Gender Studies, Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice, and the Depts. of Anthropology, Government, and Asian Studies of the University of Texas at Austin, and the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC).

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: SNAPSHOTS FROM Q&A SESSIONS

























ANNEX 2: CULTURAL EVENT

The cultural event was presented by Bangladesh Association of Greater Austin, Texas (BAGA).¹ Performances include dancing, singing, and recitation by BAGA artists. Snapshots from some of the dazzling performances are appended below:



¹ Bangladesh Association of Greater Austin, Texas, serves to promote and sustain cultural charitable, educational and community services on behalf of the Bangladeshi American community living in greater Austin, Texas.





ANNEX 3: SOCIAL EVENT

AIBS and SAI hosted a dinner for the presenters and panelists of the conferences at the... The dinner was sponsored by the Journal of Governance, Security and Development, Centre for Governance Studies (CGS), Bangladesh.

