



Plenary Session: “Defining Competition in the Indo-Pacific”

Setting the Agenda:

Peter Haas, US Ambassador in Bangladesh

Speakers:

Jeremy Bruer, Australian High Commissioner in Bangladesh

Lilly Nicholls, Canadian High Commissioner in Bangladesh

Sarah Cooke, British High Commissioner in Bangladesh

Zillur Rahman, Executive Director, CGS; Chairman of the Bay of Bengal Conversation, Bangladesh (Moderator)

About: In the ongoing paradigm shift in contemporary geopolitics, the decade-old concept of the Indo-Pacific has now emerged with renewed prominence. Based on the understanding that the diverse regions of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean constitute a linked strategic theatre, the world's most developed and powerful nations have each begun to shift their focus Eastwards. What began at first as a collective need to safeguard freedom of navigation has now evolved into detailed foreign policy doctrines, incapsulating several overlapping strategic interests, as well as new room for economic competition. However, for the region's inhabitants, this renewed prominence also brings renewed fears. While fresh competition brings with it several economic boons, the truth of the matter is that military posturing between great powers is at an all-time high, while de-escalations seem ever more fleeting. As we witness where the Indo-Pacific region is currently heading, is it possible to form a vision of an Indo-Pacific that we can all strive for?

Zillur Rahman, “Good morning everyone. What an exciting panel and in Bangladeshi context I think this is the hottest panel of the Bay of Bengal conversation. Ladies and gentlemen for this important panel I'd like to give a brief description the decade old concept of the Indo Pacific has recently arisen with new found go economic relevance amid the continuing paradigm shift in contemporary geopolitics. Based on the realization that the different regions of the Indian and Pacific Ocean form a linked strategic theater the world's most developed and Powerful Nations have begun to shift their focus eastwards. What began as a common necessity to protect freedom of passes has how evolved into sophisticated foreign policy theories. Encompassing many overlapping strategic interests as well as New Economic competitors. However, for the residents of the region this enhanced significance brings with it new anxieties, while new competition provides some economic benefits the truth is that military portioning between big countries at all-time high with de-escalation becoming increasingly more flitting. The question of the day is the same question that has been prominent in the discussion of almost all panels that have been held so far. Is it feasible to build a vision of an Indo Pacific that we can all describe for? to discuss this issue with us today and give us all an idea of the kind competition we might see in the Indo Pacific

soon, we have this most prominent Gathering of ambassadors on the stage today. In order to set the agenda for today's discussion i' would like to invite to the podium the US ambassador in Bangladesh Mr Peter Haas. Mr. Ambassador the mic is over to you.”

Peter Haas, “Good morning everyone. Distinguished High Commissioners and ambassadors esteemed guests. Researchers and analysts from the center for governance studies. I'm honored and excited to stand before you today representing the United States. As we examine a subject of immense Global importance defining competition in the indopacific region. I think this panel exemplifies the collaborative spirit that is indispensable in navigating the challenges and opportunities that Define this Dynamic region. And I'd also like to highlight the critical importance that think tanks like the center for governance studies play in advancing this important discussion that affects all of our Nations. Before we undertake the task of defining competition in the Indo Pacific first, we must ask an important question- what is at stake why is it important that we Define competition in this region? in my view the stakes are high indeed. When President Joe Biden released the United States indopacific strategy he said the future of each of our Nations and indeed the world depends upon a free and open indopacific enduring and flourishing in the decades ahead. A quick survey of the state of the region makes clear why. Stretching from the Pacific Coastline of the United States to the Indian Ocean the indopacific is the most dynamic region in the world. It is home to more than half of the world's people and nearly two third of the world's economy, half of all global trade passes through its Waters the region supports more than 3 million American jobs and is the source of nearly \$ 900 billion in foreign direct investment into the United States. But this is larger than the United States what happens here affects the entire world. And of course the people of the region are the largest stakeholders. They want more and better opportunities they want more chances to connect within their Nations between their Nations and around the world.

They want to be better prepared for crisis like the pandemic and climate change, they want peace and stability and the people throughout the indopacific also want democracy and for their human rights to be respected. So what does all of this mean first? and foremost it underscores the notion and here I'd like to quote prime minister Sheikh Hasina herself that quote, “the indopacific region must be an area of peace and prosperity for all. Our vision for the region is to have a free open peaceful secure and inclusive region.” and I'm sure the foreign minister would say the same if he were here today and the United States wholeheartedly agrees. Looking to the Future it is in all of our interest to protect that freedom that openness and I'd also like to add that diversity that make the Indo Pacific such a dynamic engine of growth and prosperity not just for the citizens of the region but for the entire world. What we can't allow is for the Strategic Challenge from authoritarian powers, powers whose actions would snuff out the sovereignty and autonomy of the Nations that make up this region and who would shut down that prosperity and diversity to go unmet. And that is why the United States has developed its vision of a free and open indopacific region and why all of us have had to think carefully in the last several years about how to design our Collective approach. My view is that competition in the Indo Pacific is not about forcing countries to choose, it's about offering an alternative Vision based on respect prosperity and partnership and allowing each individual country to choose its own path. Here as part of a panel of very good friends I'd like to take a moment to compare how we've collectively tackled the challenge of devising our strategies for the indopacific region. As we embark on this comparison of the strategies articulated by our respective Nations it's heartening to observe the Striking commonalities of our shared Vision. We collectively Champion a Resolute commitment to upholding a rules-based international order fostering robust economic integration and safeguarding the sanctity of Maritime Commons. We are also collectively committed to relying on our alliances

and Partnerships with each other and others in the region to achieve these aims. This is absolutely Central to our approach. Through deliberate multilateral Endeavors we seek to create an environment that is conducive not only to growth but to sustainable and inclusive prosperity to security and to the protection of sovereignty that extends to All indopacific Nations be they large Coastal States or small Islands. As Secretary of State **Blinken** recently said America's alliances and Partnerships are greatest strategic asset. And indeed our alliances with critical security providers like Japan, Australia, the UK and Canada have been key underlying enablers of growth and prosperity since the end of World War II. Our growing relationship with India other Regional partners and our oas Endeavor will greatly strengthen that endeavor. Here I would like to note Bangladesh recently released its own indopacific Outlook which outlined a number of important principles and the way Bangladesh sees its role in the region. We applaud Bangladesh's vision of a free open peaceful secure and inclusive indopacific and note the very significant overlap with our own indopacific strategy including on issues such as freedom of navigation and overflight, open transparent and rules-based multilateral systems and environmental resilience. Here we also underscore that just as we seek a free and open region We Believe we can only truly fulfill these Visions when we apply those principles domestically as well. As liberal democracies the countries represented on this panel also recognize the importance of human rights to safe guarding peace and prosperity in the Indo Pacific. At the very core of the US indopacific strategy lies an unwavering dedication to promoting and safeguarding these ideas. These values are not just mere rhetorical constructs they are the very Foundation or more specifically the healthy vibrant roots from Which social well-being, human security, economic prosperity and state sovereignty grow. History shows societies Thrive when individuals are accorded the freedom to express their opinions to participate meaningfully in the governance of their Nations and to enjoy the full

spectrum of their fundamental rights. And we have seen this story play out in this region repeatedly. There are many examples of democratic economies taking off and democratic nations truly coming into their own and there are more of these examples than there are of Nations thriving under autocracy or under the shadow of more powerful neighbors. Looking around the region Nations such as Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia demonstrate that when people are secure when their rights are protected when they can access information and contribute to how they're governed they are better connected to the global economy feel empowered to pursue opportunities and live up to their potentials and what they can achieve. In short it is through the steadfast adherence to these Bedrock principles that we lay the foundation for enduring sustainable development and the harmonious coexistence of Nations. We encourage Bangladesh to recognize the importance of these principles as it develops its own Outlook. The discussion of Partnerships and democracy in the Indo Pacific points us to a considerable to the consideration of the need to ensure a region comprised of diverse Sovereign independent states where no one country dominates. As we contemplate this region and especially South Asia we are met with a host of nations with long and Rich histories. Yet ones that are undeniably forward-looking in their aspirations. Many of these nations embody the spirit of strategic autonomy and sovereignty including Bangladesh. This is something we recognize admire and respect. We believe this presents opportunities for diverse Partnerships to tackle a range of regional and Global issues including with the United States. This is what secretary **Blinken** recently referred to as diplomatic variable geometry, it's a bit geeky but the idea is that we start by looking at the problem that we need to solve and then we work back from there assembling the exact group of Partners that's the right size and the right shape to address it. We're intentional about determining the combination that's truly fit for purpose. Few regions present as many opportunities

as South Asia and those opportunities go well beyond the region as well. A good example is the groundbreaking effort we announced at the G-20 to connect India to Europe through the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel. This initiative will spur opportunities and Investments across the two continents only by respecting and protecting diversity in the indopacific and here in South Asia can we ensure we have the various perspectives skill sets and National capabilities to tackle shared challenges. It is our hope to nurture relationships founded on mutual respect shared interests and a collaborative spirit that advances the common good not just for our Nations but for the entire region and Beyond. As we chart our course through the coming decades in the Indo Pacific we must not lose sight of the evolving nature of the People's Republic of China and its influence. The Belt and Road initiative along with prc's expansive Maritime Ambitions have signaled a new epic in the Dynamics of this region. And this brings us to the most pressing strategic challenge to our vision of a free and open indopacific. Authoritarian Powers trying to alter fundamental rules of the road in international Affairs. We must approach this juncture with unyielding vigilance aware that unchecked PRC influence May challenge the sovereignty and strategic autonomy of indopacific Nations. This in turn could precipitate instability and impede the prosperity we collectively seek. Separate but related Russia's brutal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine is a wake-up call to the world. It demonstrates that the ideals we aspire to not just in the indopacific but globally cannot be taken for granted and rather they must be defended. We like many others are greatly encouraged to know that Bangladesh fully understands this principle and its implications for this region. In April honorable prime minister Sheikh Hasina along with her Japanese counterpart stated the war in Ukraine constitutes a violation of international law in particular of the UN Charter and is a serious threat to the international order based on the rule of law with ramifications well beyond Europe including in the Indo Pacific. This was a strong acknowledgment of the need to work

together to preserve a rules-based order against those who seek to undermine it. When it comes to the PRC we openly acknowledge it is the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and potentially the economic diplomatic military and technological power to do it. And at the same time China's integral to the global economy the United States and the PRC can and should work together on global challenges like macroeconomic stability, climate change Health security and food security. The United States will conduct itself as a reasonable leader, we do not seek conflict and we do not seek a cold war but we will be unabashed in promoting our vision of a free open secure and prosperous world and what we have to offer communities of Nations. These include Investments that are designed not to Foster dependency but to alleviate burdens and help Nations become self-sufficient Partnerships not to create political obligations but mutually beneficial relations. We will not illegally fish in other nations Waters, we do not militarize islands and then claim an economic zone around them, we do not send Merchant vessels to harass the sailors of other countries, nor will we use debt as leverage to undermine other nations sovereignty. We don't expect other every other country to have the exact same assessment of China as we do. We know that many economies including the United States have vital economic or people to- people ties with China that they want to preserve. This is why we firmly believe that competition in the Indo Pacific is not about forcing countries to choose it's about offering an alternative Vision based on respect prosperity and partnership. In closing it's my hope that our definition of competition in this region allows us to renew our sense of purpose and reinvigorate our commitment to a shared vision for the indopacific. Together we stand as stewards of stability prosperity and inclusivity. By championing democracy human rights and open dialogue, we pave the way for a region that not only endures but thrives. Through the recognition of our Sovereign foreign policy prerogatives, we forge Partnerships that based on mutual respect shared aspirations

and especially in the case of our friends on this panel Partnerships and alliances that transcend borders and stand as a testament to our Collective commitment to a stable and prosperous indopacific. I look forward to hearing from the distinguished envoys from the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. Thank you very much.”

Zillur Rahman, “thank you Mr Ambassador. now to give the perspective of Great Britain regarding the competition in the Indo Pacific I would like to call on the podium the British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Miss Sarah Cooke.”

Sarah Cooke, “excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen firstly let me express my thanks to the Center for governance studies for organizing this event today. And I'm delighted to sit on the panel for such an important topic that is because the indopacific region and the Bay of Bengal within that is critical to the UK's economy security and our interests in an open and stable international order. As we've heard the indopacific is home to the over half of the world's population including over 1.7 billion UK citizens. Over 50% of global growth is projected to come from the indopacific by 2050. 60% of global trade passes through shipping routes in the Indo Pacific and the region is critical in accelerating the world's transition to Net Zero. The UK's integrated review refresh published earlier this year reaffirmed our permanent commitment to the indopacific. We are committed to supporting a free and open indopacific where sovereignty and territorial Integrity are respected and where states can make choices free from coercion, disinformation and interference. And our role in the indopacific region will be stable long-term and guided by regional perspectives, such as ASEAN centrality. Ambitious and effective Partnerships are key to achieving our objectives and we are prioritizing working with and through regional partners and institutions in the indopacific. For example, the UK became Asian's first new dialogue partner in 25 years in 2021 and we have now joined the CPTPP. In parallel we are

working to help other regional initiatives such as IOR and BIMSTEC drive table change in the Bay of Bengal. And the UK shares a similar Vision to Bangladesh for the indopacific. We share a commitment to sovereignty and territorial Integrity as members of the Commonwealth Family we share a belief in the value of democracy of free trade and open markets. We want a safe prosperous region that is governed by the rules-based International System and where resources are used sustainably to safeguard their benefit for future Generations. Our historic partnership with Bangladesh is a unique and valued relationship cemented by our diaspora cultural trade and economic links. We are also working in partnership with Bangladesh to tackle Regional and Global challenges from climate and biodiversity to Maritime security and to the International System of rules and Norms. I want to reflect on three areas today, first prosperity and growth, second the important importance of the rules-based International System and third taking action on climate change. Firstly, on prosperity and growth Bangladesh has achieved tremendous levels of economic development over several decades. From being the world's second poorest country in 1971 it is now preparing to graduate from least developed country status in 2026. And the UK is proud to have been a development partner of Bangladesh during this time. And we now look forward to building a modern economic partnership focused on boosting trade and investment and supporting the economic reform and Export diversification needed to help the economy grow sustainably. For example, the UK's new developing countries trading scheme will provide Bangladesh duty-free quota-free access to the UK Market on everything but arms until 2029. And thereafter enhanced UK Market access for 98% of product lines. The DCTS is the most generous global trade preference scheme in the world and Bangladesh is one of the biggest beneficiaries. But achieving growth and building Prosperity will be impossible without upholding and championing the rules-based International System. Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine a calculated assault on the UN

Charter has caused significant economic hardship around the world. In the case of Bangladesh, it's driving up food- fertilizer and fuel price inflation and damaging economic growth. This serves as a reminder why our common vision for the indopacific and the Bay of Bengal region needs to be collectively defended because European and indopacific prosperity economies and security are tied together more than ever before. The UK is well on its way to becoming the European partner with the broadest most integrated presence in the Indo Pacific. And we are delivering on our commitment to uphold the rules-based International System in the region. For example, we are working with Partners to promote Maritime security and uphold the UN convention on the law of the sea. A clause is now over 40 years old but continues to play an essential role not least here in the Bay of Bengal. The Royal Navy has permanently deployed two offshore Patrol vessels HMS Tamar and HMS spay to the indopacific. These ships carry out regular exercises with naval fleets in the region focused on upholding the rules-based International System. For example, through tackling illegal fishing or people smuggling. The AUKUS security partnership with our us and Australian allies which will help promote a free and open indopacific that is secure and stable. And together with India we are working to develop a regional Maritime Center of Excellence for the Bay of Bengal working closely with Mar time authorities across the region including here in Bangladesh. The center will work to ensure the resilience of the Bay from tackling criminality to providing early storm warnings. And the long tradition of Naval cooperation between the UK and Bangladesh is a Cornerstone of our enduring partnership. HMS Tamar visited Bangladesh earlier this year and we look forward to Future visits. I now turn to one of the most pressing challenges facing us all climate change. We need a truly Global commitment to addressing climate change. The impacts and consequences of which are increasingly evident in the indopacific region. Climate change is expected that looms over us all and it amplifies all of the challenges that we face. And

these challenges cannot be solved by any one country alone nor can they be solved by any one region alone. Bangladesh as one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the world is playing a key role internationally but to drive international action on climate change the UK and Bangladesh worked in Partnership to raise Global ambition at cop-26 in Glasgow. And we will continue to work closely to turn Global commitments into action in line with the UK-Bangladesh climate Accord which we signed in March of this year. This commits us to work together on adaptation, mitigation and climate Finance as well as loss and damage. In conclusion the UK's vision is for a free and open indopacific a region that is secure and stable enabling prosperity and sustainable economic growth. With growth enabled through an International System of norms and rules which the UK is committed to upholding. We are ready to work with Bangladesh and our International partners and allies to realize that Vision. Thank you very much.”

Zillur Rahman, “thank you High Commissioner. now to give the Canadian perspective regarding competition in the Indo Pacific I would like to invite on the podium Canadian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Dr Lilly Nicholls and we have another High Commissioner Canadian High commission for the day but Lilly will introduce her later Dr Lilly Nicholls.”

Lilly Nicholls, “Asalam alaykum and thank you **Zillur**, congratulations also for organizing this amazing dialogue much needed and very timely and as Zillur has mentioned today I have the honor of having with me Miss **Swapna Akter** who standing right there who's officially Canada's High Commissioner for the day. so she's been very busy this [Applause] morning. So I'm giving her a little bit of a break giving her a little bit of a rest. but this is part of course the celebration of the international day of the girl child on October 11th and it's part of the plan International's girls takeover initiative. So I'm very honored to be able to spend the day with Swapna. I think that my esteemed fellow panelists and colleagues have echoed how important the topic of the Indo Pacific

is today and I think you know judging by the great participation and the eager interest in this room and we all agree that really the region is at the epicenter of a major Global generational shift that requires a significant and an enduring response. And this is certainly the case of Canada's own Indo Pacific strategy. like my colleagues have mentioned the indopacific is of extreme importance to the world and to Canada. It is today you know the home of two third of the world's population it two third of the world's middle class and one half of global GDP for Canada it is our second largest trading block and it which is and a value of \$200 billion of Trade, One in five Canadians link their Heritage to the region and two third of our International students also come from the Indo Pacific. So our futures are completely interlined and there's no other region in the world that impacts the lives and will impact the future of Canadians more than the Indo Pacific. Canada's Indo Pacific strategy recognizes this importance it is a comprehensive strategy it is long-term and it is whole of government underpinning the Canadian IPS is the importance that Canada be a player in for the long term in the indopacific that it invest in expanding and strengthening Partnerships. But at the same time the IPS is about protecting Canadian values and promoting Canadian interests and we're Unapologetic about that in that sense it's very much distinctly a Canadian indopacific strategy and it's a Game Changer in terms of Canadian Forum policy. The strategy comes with a series of major investment human resources and cooperation mechanisms. It includes for example a special reporter for the indopacific Ambassador **Ian McKay** it includes a special trade representative for the indopacific Mr **Toppel**, it includes also \$2.3 billion in terms of investment including 750 million for a sustainable infrastructure fund and as part of this 10 year strategy it also includes a series of scholarships, it includes technical assistance from Canadian experts the strengthening of Asian expertise within Canada the department of global Affairs, and of course an increased presence in the field throughout the Indo Pacific including the strengthening of Visa

processing capacity. So it's one of the most important Investments that has been made through Canadian foreign policy in in many decades. The strategy as I mentioned has is comprehensive and has four pillars so if I may I would like to maybe say a little bit about each one of these pillars. The first one is basically perhaps the most important it's that of security and stability in the region. And like my fellow like-minded ambassadors the objective here of course is to promote a free an open an inclusive indopacific. And in this sense Canada in particular is conscious that it is so important that competition in the indopacific not lead to conflict or violence. And Canada's aim in this pillar is to position itself as a strategic and key partner in terms of Defense diplomacy. This includes for example our role in events like the peacekeeping conference that took place in Bangladesh a few months ago it includes a strong promotion of the women peace and security agenda in which both Canada and Bangladesh have been leaders worldwide. And I want to be really unequivocal in this there can be no peace or stability in the Indo Pacific with an exodus of a million people in the region. And of course that means that the rohingya refugee crisis which has now become a protracted crisis is absolutely essential to address if we're going to have a free and a stable and a peaceful Indo Pacific. Canada's indopacific strategy specifically states that Canada is committed to the next phase of the Canadian response to the rohingya, Canada has already been a leader in this area and has invested half a billion dollars in creating programs for rohingya refugees to make sure that there's lifesaving support systems for them also promoting their skills development, their options for livelihoods their resilience and their long-term sustainability. But beyond the work in the refugee camps for Canada it is equally important and I know it is for my fellow allies and for Bangladesh to also pressure the government of Myanmar the military Who to be accountable for its human rights violations in the international court system but also working with Asian countries and other South Asian countries to make sure that this issue is not forgotten

worldwide and that it's understood how important it is to resolve here in the region. The second important pillar of the Canadian Indo-Pacific strategy is that of inclusive and economic growth. And I think we've heard some statistics about how important the region is for Global growth and in Canadians are very aware of how Bangladesh itself with 6% growth and unprecedented poverty reduction in the past 50 years Bangladesh has been part of this key economic success in the region. For Canada this is extremely important that we continue to work together with Bangladesh our two-way free trade relationship is a 4-billion-dollar relationship which we are committed to continuing to grow but most importantly to also diversify. So that like Bangladesh's own development plan perspective plan for 2041 we want to work with Bangladesh to on Innovation on research on increasing its productivity, Canada has a number of initiatives to support this kind of work. For the past years Canada has given Bangladesh free access to tariff and quota access to Bangladeshi export through the generalized preferential tariff this will be extended until 2029. And most importantly we've been working since the Rana Plaza disaster with Bangladesh to improve safety to improve labor conditions in factories and moving forward labor rights the rights of Association the rights of Fair wages the rights of women to be free of harassment in labor firms in the RMG sector and many other sectors these will be important elements of the success of Bangladesh and of trade for the region. Canada also is aware that research and education are extremely important. So we're also partnering with Bangladesh not just to help Bangladeshi students travel to Canada but also to build capacities here in Bangladesh and an example of this is the Bangabandhu- Pierre Elliot Trudeau agricultural Research Center which is a collaboration between Canadian and Bangladesh universities to build productivity here in Agricultural and productivity and to pave the way for Bangladesh's graduation from LDC status. A third pillar is that of sustainable and green growth where Canada has played a role globally through an

investment of 5.2 billion dollars to help developing countries adapt and mitigate climate change effects and here in Bangladesh, we are also pivoting our own International assistance program to work more on biodiversity issues in the Chittagong Hill tracks for example. And we also recognize how Bangladesh is a leader in this area as well as well as in disaster risk reduction and Canada is working for example with the red crescent Society at present through the Canadian Red Cross to build capacities of Bangladesh emergency response operations to improve their connectivity to improve their access to technology. And these are areas that we commit ourselves to continuing to work on. The fourth and final pillar and very much the glue to all of Canada's Indo Pacific strategy is promoting People to People links. And here Canada is very lucky that we have a long term and deeply rooted friendship with Bangladesh Canada was one of the first countries to recognize Bangladesh's Independence and to provide food Aid to Bangladesh at a time where many were deeming the country to be a basket case Canada was there and we've stayed there for the past 50 years supporting Bangladeshi efforts always based on mutual respect supporting Bangladesh's major Innovations it's movement on micro Finance it's women's empowerment movement it's respected now globally renowned institutions BRAC the ICDDRBR these are now organizations that are studying in the classrooms in universities all over the world. And we're very proud to continue to work with Bangladesh. But also, to evolve our International assistance as Bangladesh's own development challenges evolve to include newer issues such as Innovation competitiveness the need for Technical vocational skills and of course our strategy is also focused on crosscutting focus on human rights on women's rights and on the rights of minorities. So to conclude Zillur let me say that you know you phrased our panel today as focused on competition but I have to keep coming back to the importance of cooperation and like Bangladesh Canada is not a superpower which means that we depend on being a multilateralist nation on being a conciliator a connector

so we depend on an approach to the Indo Pacific that is an a Cooperative approach. Canada and Bangladesh have much in common in this sense, we're both multilateralist we're both connectors we're peacekeepers we're Nations that are Multicultural multilingual and ethnically diverse these are values that are enshrined in our constitutions but they're also part of the root and the emergence of our nation states. This is the core of Canada's approach to the indopacific it's an approach to protecting sovereignty multilateralism as rules-based international system based on Democracy human rights and respect for inclusion. Thank you very much.”

Zillur Rahman, “thank you High Commissioner now to give the perspective of the a of Australia the competition in in the Pacific. I'd like to call on the podium Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Mr **Jeremy Bruer**, Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh.”

Jeremy Bruer, “Asalamu alaykum. Everybody good morning. Excellencies, distinguished guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen many thanks in particular to **Zillur Rahman** and the center for governance studies for organizing this forum and for its very impressive program of speakers the Bay of Bengal conversation is an excellent opportunity for countries in the indopacific and their Partners to discuss the increasing strategic importance of the indopacific region. And I suppose from my perspective the disadvantage of going last is that you have to come up with something original I suspect that what I have a lot to say will Echo rather than repeat what we've heard earlier but a lot of similar themes I suspect. The Bay of Bengal is a key sub region of the indopacific and Bangladesh is a very important and increasingly influential country in that region. for Australia why is the indopacific important well like Bangladesh we're in it for Australia the Indo Pacific is our home, the indopacific is the lens through which we see and interact with the world. As a country we wake up every morning and we see the sun rising over the Pacific Ocean we go to bed every night and we watch it set over the Indian Ocean. So, our interests concerns and priorities

Center on this region and we seek a region in which we can live according to our own laws and values as determined by our citizens pursue our own prosperity and make our own choices and cooperate trade and Thrive through mutually respectful relations with others. It follows that it's in Australia's interest for the indopacific region to be open stable prosperous and inclusive operate in by mutually agreed rules standards and Norms. We want a region in which each country can pursue its own aspirations in which no country dominates and no country is dominated. If there was any doubt about it Russia's illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine highlights starkly our interests in making sure our region is one in which sovereignty is respected regardless of the size of the Nations involved. The Indo Pacific is a theater of strategic competition economic diplomatic strategic and Military aspects are all interwoven framed by an intense contest of narratives and affected too by events further a filled. This competition as we've heard isn't just about powers for competing for Primacy it's a contest over the way in which our region and our world work. It's not something that countries need to make choices about and having said that there is no shortage of things for countries to understand and cope with. Tensions have Arisen with overlapping claims in the South China Sea we've seen military modernization at a pace and scale not seen in the world for nearly a century and little in the way I might say of transparency or reassurance about strategic intent. North Korea continues to destabilize the region with its nuclear weapons program and its ballistic missile launches. We've seen countries nearby struggling as a result of unsustainable debt. In Bangladesh we've seen tensions in a neighbor's spill over the Border leading to the influx of almost a million traumatized people. We've seen devastating social and economic effects brought about by a global pandemic and we're working together to try and tackle and respond to the effects of climate change which affect us all. These developments make it all the more challenging for countries to exercise agency to contribute to a regional balance of power and to decide their own

Destinies and this is important. Because the region isn't merely as I say a theatre of major power competition it's home to a large number of states each with its own agency to shape the region in which they live. The vision of an inclusive indopacific region in which countries can exercise their sovereignty and make decisions in their own interest is shared by Bangladesh. As outlined in its own indopacific Outlook which Australia warmly welcomes. Ladies and gentlemen Australia is using all the levers of statecraft to shape our region. We're working with Partners such as Bangladesh bilaterally and through a variety of regional and multilateral forums including Apec ASEAN the Pacific Islands forum and yes diplomatic Partnerships including the quad so that we can deliver positive practical support that responds to regional priorities. We want to help ensure the indopacific remains inclusive we want to sure it remains open we want to sure it remains stable we want to sure it ensures it remains prosperous and a region in which sovereignty and international law are respected. Well-functioning Regional architecture helps to Foster an inclusive Regional order in which all countries can have a say and especially in which small and medium sized countries like Australia like Bangladesh can work together to shape outcomes in their Collective interest and where the international rules standards and Norms that benefit smaller countries can be sustained. Countries in the Indo Pacific share common challenges some of which I've mentioned already including by the impact of climate change environmental and Maritime security supporting in adherence to mutually agreed rules and norms and how to include in inclusive economic growth. As I said a few moments ago a stable and prosperous region is good for Australia it's unambiguously in our interest that countries in our region maximize their economic potential and help to improve the lives of their own people. To that end Australia has recently launched a new International Development policy which concentrates on building Partnerships based on respect and on listening to and learning from each other. In order to address

the challenges of our region to achieve an indopacific that is peaceful stable and prosperous and inclusive. We'll also continue to work with partners and to nurture new Partnerships as we seek to contribute to a regional balance a strategic balance in the region. The Australian government recently released the defense strategic review and the government's response to that review the National Defense statement 2023. The National Defense statement 2023 sets out a blueprint for Australia's strategic policy defense planning and resourcing over the coming decades. We will invest in capabilities that are relevant to the risks that we Face including enhanced long-range capabilities across all domains space, Sun, cyber, air, Land and Sea. The government has directed that we must have the capacity to defend Australia and our immediate region to deter Far denial any adversaries attempt to project power against Australia through our Northern approaches and to protect Australia's connection economic connection to our region in the world. Also, the government has directed that we contribute with our partners to the collective security of the indopacific and contribute with our partners to the maintenance of the global rules-based order. Australia always tries to make our interests transparent and how the we will pursue them clear. So ladies and gentlemen Australia is an Engaged International participant in the indopacific, we understand the need to work with others to support Australia's and our partners security and economic strength and to shape the region and the world for the better. We welcome the positive engagements of all stakeholders in contributing to the maintaining maintenance of the Strategic balance of our shared indopacific region and in upholding the norms and rules that have underpinned Decades of peace and prosperity in our region. We want to see that continue. The Bay of Bengal provides a perfect opportunity for stake holders to discuss opportunities to discuss the importance of cooperation and to discuss how best to address the shared challenges that we all face in our Indo Pacific. Thank you.”

Zillur Rahman, “thank you High Commissioner now I'll take a few questions from the audience and there are standing mics over there if you have any questions please go to the step to the mic and ask your question but no introduction, just introduce yourself and please keep in brief and ask only one question.”

Question One, “I am Aminul Karim. I'm a retired soldier of Bangladesh Army. My question is directed to Peter H his Excellency the Ambassador of United States of America to Bangladesh. My question is very straightforward Excellency- what are your concrete strategies to constructively engage China? China is a indopacific power China has 1.4 billion people you have huge interdependence with China you have lot of Trades with China and China is a power which is rising and then you have thorn issues like South China and Taiwan.

Question two, “thank you I am Mahabubur Rahman professor of political science at noth South University. my question to not any specific panelist but to the entire panel anyone can respond and I would greatly appreciate if all of them can respond to this. Our great friend Lily has already mentioned about The rohingya crisis, perhaps we cannot think of any stable peaceful prosperous Indo Pacific region without paying due attention to this crisis. I was wondering what would be your response to the proposal that Bangladesh first placed even though very unfortunately it didn't follow any consistent policy later about creating a peaceful Zone inside Myanmar where the rohingya can be repatriated and it would be conducted by the United Nations supervisions and protection any specific thought on this issue. Thank you very much.”

Question three, “I'll just have my introduction I am also General Amsa Amin who also an ambassador to many countries I have diplomatic work for 10 years and now I engaged in the political work in Bangladesh I'm actually party called Nwoitic Somaj. It relates to this panel Nwoitic Somaj actually wants to bring to the Forefront of Politics the democratic values and ethics

in the transformation of Bangladesh political culture now my view on this aspect by the Western ambassadors and high Commissioners. The question now is simple one does the panel think the Revival of SAARC South Asian Association for cooperation can contribute towards the achievement of the goals of Asia Pacific strategy? thank you”

Question four, “this is Nabila and my question was we talk about cooperation but then why are we Bangladesh is always lagging behind? and then another thing is the when we talk about Partnerships we are always directed towards the Eastern countries as Western countries are more developed we see so; why don't we be invited to their side so we can make more better alliances or a better communication to develop the countries at East? thank you.”

Question five, “thank you, my question is that Ambassador has Ambassador you spoke greatly on the importance of our involvement in the indopacific strategy. I've been teaching International Security in Dhaka University for the last 40 years and I'm a graduate of pen, University of Pennsylvania. I haven't had much chance to interact in any of the sessions but then since I have a chance I would like to emphasize to you that if we the Bangladeshi have a chance to express our opinion to the votes we would inevitably vote for greater bilateral defense cooperation with the United States. We would like to have an American presence in the Bay of Bengal we would like to see that we play a role with you in the liberation of the Myanmar people and get rid of the Tatmadaw. As you had said that the aim of the initiative is to end authoritarianism in the region. Bangladesh if it had a chance to vote would inevitably support a joint US- Bangladesh role in sending the rohingyas back to arakan perhaps even a free arakan if things change. There's one thing that perhaps you had not spoken in this country that is the Burma act one we hope that you throw some light on the Burma act which was approved unanimously through a bipartisan

resolution of the Congress something I think the Congress gives a lot of importance to. Thank you very much.”

Question Six, “I’m Saif Hussain. I have a question to Peter haas. Corruption is one of the key concern of Indo Pacific strategy and Joe Biden foreign policy too. so Do you think US may use the corruption tool against Bangladesh in future? things like money laundering Etc.” **Question Seven**, “thank you, I am also General but not the major general or general I’m Secretary General Bureau of Human Rights. So as a different General my question is also different to his Excellency Peter haas and his Excellency the Australian High Commissioner. Both of you are very much concerned and your speech was also in relating democracy, human rights, good governance Etc. My question is that since democracy is always depends on human rights if there is not a good human rights position in a country so democracy cannot be strengthened and to ensure the human rights once need a good governance. Good governance always depends on the rule of law vis-e-vis of is Rule of Justice. We have all the issues government is blaming that is ensuring but what do you think that rule of justice is more important than that of rule of law? and Rule of justice is truly ensured in rest of the countries as well as Bangladesh as well and if you think that not then which side has to be given more look into it?”

Lilly Nicholls, “thank you very much for the very interesting questions and points on the issue of the rohingya. all refugees all exile their goal is always to return home and that is the case of the rohingya as well but they cannot do so unless it's safe to do so. And then the problem is that despite several attempts that have been made they have not been able to go home safely and to go home with opportunities as well with rights as Citizens with access to land. So in the interim it is all of our issue and we need to collectively continue to support them. Bangladesh has done a tremendous amount more than its share in this respect but as the resources diminish it is important to think

about how the rohingya can be given for example skills development so that they can reintegrate when they do go home and also give them livelihood opportunities while here in Bangladesh so they can contribute to Bangladesh's productivity. In other refugee camps all over the world that is what happens they are the refugees are able to be economically active and contribute to the host country.” in terms of the SAARC and Regional integration. I think that I've spent a lot of my career working in Latin America for example where Regional integration is a big part of the success story of the region I think there's huge potential for greater Regional integration. And I think our various Indo Pacific strategies including Bangladesh indopacific Outlook has a potential to contribute to that. And finally with respect to Partnerships I don't think it's a matter of East versus West I think that you know Bangladesh and all of us the more diverse our Partnerships the Richer and the better and the most inclusive we are. Thank you.”

Zillur Rahman, “thank you High Commissioner High Commissioner Jeremy Bruer two minutes please if you need.”

Jeremy Bruer, “Yes thank you, look I'm have to say it's hard to hear the questions very clearly up here. So forgive me if I haven't addressed them in any great detail. But in terms of the rohingya we are committed to continuing to support the rohingya regard the ultimate solution as being repatriation. And we support that happening once conditions are conducive to the safe return of the people who are currently in Bangladesh and elsewhere. and until that time Australia will continue to support the Bangladesh government as it looks after as it has done for the last six or seven years those people in the camps and in Bashan Char for all of the needs that they have. We have contributed round about a half a billion dollars of our own to that exercise over the last five six years it is now is not it so sorry. And we absolutely support their return but we do hope that conditions will become conducive on the other side of the Border before that happens. And indeed

we are working on the other side of the border with our own humanitarian and development programs to try and create conditions that are conducive. So we're trying to take a cross border approach to this issue and working with in forums around the world to try and encourage a long-term solution and working very closely with the government of Bangladesh and with other governments represented here at this table to support the needs of the people currently in the camps. on Regional integration that's something that we consider to be a priority for this region, I believe that the net incomes of all of the countries in this region will be significantly enhanced if the level of interconnectivity is improved we hear quite often that the amount of connectivity that exists within countries or between countries in this region is lower than it was 80 years ago and the amount of GDP that would flow increase in GDP that would flow from improving that is considerable and would benefit the people from this country and all of the other countries in the region. And we are more than happy to work with Bangladesh in trying to achieve that end. there was a question about the rule of law and the rule of Justice well I think the rule of law enables the rule of Justice. because it means that people have to follow the law and they can't make decisions on their own basis they can't direct that certain people be treated by the law in a certain way they have to follow what the law says and to me that's one way of ensuring Justice. And I'm sorry I not sure I heard any more of the questions thank you.

Zillur Rahman, “thank you Jeremy, high commissioner Sarah Cooke.”

Sarah Cooke, “thank you and like my colleagues I did struggle to hear some of the questions but I heard there were a number relating to the plight of the rohingya and that's something that the UK has been incredibly focused on and also something that Bangladesh has been very generous in hosting the rohingya refugees since the crisis but ultimately the solution to the rohingya crisis lies in Myanmar. and as my Canadian colleague said the rohingya do want to go home when the

conditions are right. the first visit I went on after arriving in Bangladesh earlier on this year was down to the camps I went down to Cox's Bazaar and to Teknaf to see for myself just the situation of the refugees in the camps and it is very desperate. And as talking to them they said we would like to go home but only when the conditions are right. And we're very clear that the conditions are not yet conducive for the rohingya to go home for them to have a safe a voluntary and a dignified return to Myanmar. So that's why we with our colleagues here are working to support the government of Bangladesh and international Partners to who are hosting the refugees to make life a little bit better for them. The UK is the second largest donor to the crisis since 2017 after our US colleagues we've given over 360 million pounds since 2017 to support the camps but also to support the host communities the local communities because it's really important that we work to support both. But I think the other thing that's really important is keeping the spotlight on this crisis. There are so many other crises around the world it risks becoming a forgotten crisis and that's something that the UK is particularly focused on in keeping the international Spotlight on the rohingya particularly through our role in the UN Security Council the UK is the pen holder on the issue of Myanmar in the security Council. And we are using that as a way to keep the spotlight on the crisis and also to hold Myanmar to account. So, I think it's that two-prong approach supporting the refugees whilst they are still here but also keeping the international Spotlight on the on the crisis. So, we don't forget and we can keep the Rohingya and keep the accountability focus on the on the regime in Myanmar. On Regional integration again like my colleagues it's a really important area it's very important to boost economic growth across the region. I've worked in East Africa where a huge amount of work has been done to promote Regional economic integration and I think there is a huge scope to do more in this region too. The UK in particular is focused on interconnectivity on economic integration. we're doing a lot of work in that area and we'll continue

to do so because we think it's such an important area to focus on in order to boost the economies of the whole of South Asia. Thanks.”

Zillur Rahman, “thank you **Sarah**. Ambassador **Peter Haas**.”

Peter Haas, “the great thing about so many questions is I get to pick which ones I answer. so the question about and you admitted this wasn't your own view about the United States pushing for democracy and free and fair elections because of our desire to dominate this region. I would rather say that it's part of the universal Declaration of Human Rights that all of our countries have signed up to and it's simply that we're advocating for the same thing that we all have agreed on. so I don't think it's about dominating the region at all it's about the importance of that. It leads to the second question about concrete steps we're taking about Chinese influence, I think the word was against China and the whole thrust of my speech was not was that competition this this is a competition of ideas and not a competition that we want to become one of force. It's a competition of ideas and whether as countries we believe in Notions of transparency of the role of democracy of the role of Human Rights the role of the private sector. It's about those things that we're pushing for and the competition we're engaged in about whether we want those ideals or we want authoritarian ideals. And then it relates directly to the question on whether Bangladesh looks to the east or looks to the West, I think rather than viewing it in geographic terms like that it goes back to this decision about whether you look for the model that I think the four of us our countries are promoting or if you look for another model that you want to replicate and that's Bangladesh's decision to make. Thank you.”

Zillur Rahman, “thank you Ambassador thank you high Commissioners and once again thanks to all my esteemed panelist for all your insightful remarks and important remarks and thanks to our most honorable audience for taking the time to listen. I hope this panel has given you sufficient

Food For Thought regarding a competition in the IND Pacific let's thanking the panel with Applause.”