

Welcome Remarks

by

Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia

Director General, ICWA

at

Fourteenth Sapru House Lecture

by

H.E. Mr. H. T. Imam

Advisor to Bangladesh Prime Minister

at

Sapru House, New Delhi

16 January 2015

H.E. Mr. H.T.Imam, Political Advisor to Bangladesh Prime Minister, Ambassador Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, Excellencies, Esteemed Guests, Research Scholars, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the host institution, the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), I extend a most cordial welcome to you all. It is my privilege to warmly welcome our Chief Guest H.E. Mr. Imam who will deliver the Fourteenth Sapru House Lecture today. The subject, as you know, is “Perspectives on Developments in Bangladesh and Relations with India.”

2. Our esteemed guest has travelled especially for the two events scheduled to take place at Sapru House today. This lecture is meant to remember the founders, promoters and supporters of ICWA on which the Parliament of India has bestowed the status of “an institution of national importance.” The second event would be a closed door Round Table Discussion on the theme “The Liberation War of Bangladesh – the Indian Connection’, which will take place this afternoon in this complex itself.

3. H.E. Mr. Imam is Political Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. He enjoys the rank and status of Cabinet Minister. He has had a distinguished record in the political and civil service domains. He is presently the Co-chair of the Election Committee of Awami League Party, and also a member of its Advisory Council. He served as the first Cabinet Secretary to the Government of Bangladesh after the Liberation War of 1971. Later he handled numerous important and sensitive positions.

4. Mr. Imam has travelled to many countries on official missions. He has numerous publications to his credit. From the long list of studies and papers published by him, an important product should be mentioned here. It is named ‘Bangladesh Government 1971-75’, which is a fully documented 678-page history of the development and structure of the Government of Bangladesh during those early years. This was published in September 2013.

5. While I would prefer to leave to the Chair to introduce the subject of today's lecture to you, I would like to make a few preliminary observations. My own personal interest and involvement in Bangladesh dates back to early 1990s when I had the privilege to serve as Joint Secretary (BSM) in the Ministry of External Affairs. In that capacity, one spent most of one's working time on dossiers relating to India-Bangladesh relations. Much has changed since then. Our relationship with Bangladesh stands significantly strengthened, deepened and diversified. We still have some issues, but there is none of them that cannot be resolved and addressed through mutual consultations. Among our scholars, I notice a great deal of support for the notion that some of the remaining issues, particularly the operationalisation of the Land Boundary Agreement and sharing of Teesta River Water deserve priority.

6. I have also noticed that our research community remains deeply interested in studying and understanding the complexities of the politics in Bangladesh. We keep hearing and reading about divergences among certain political ideologies. We would particularly be interested to hear our Chief Guest on this aspect as well as the appeal of secular and radical streams, and the prospects of a better working relationship and dialogue between the two country's principal political parties. We are aware that the Bangladesh economy has been performing much better than in the past. His take on its future trends will also be useful.

7. Above all, we look forward to hearing about Bangladesh's views on the current projects for regional cooperation, especially under SAARC, and for sub-regional cooperation especially under BIMSTEC. The sensitive subject of the involvement of extra-regional powers in South Asia is also a subject of immense interests to us along with the implications of the rise of China on the future of South Asia.

8. Dear friends, please do get ready for a most stimulating forenoon with H.E. Mr. Imam. May I request you to put your hands together to warmly welcome our honoured Chief Guest.
