



Integrated Country Strategy

Bangladesh

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1. Chief of Mission Priorities

Bangladesh, with a population of over 165 million, is the third largest Muslim-majority country and the eighth most populous in the world, strategically located at the crossroads between South and Southeast Asia. Carefully balancing its relations especially with India and China, the country should play an important role in facilitating the success of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy to promote a free, open, and rules-based international system. With average economic growth exceeding six percent for more than the past decade, Bangladesh just met all three eligibility criteria for graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) status in 2024. This achievement underscores Bangladesh's extraordinary development success – and the efficacy of USAID's \$6 billion in assistance – since independence in 1971. For the foreseeable future, Bangladesh will continue to host most of the nearly 700,000 ethnic Rohingya who fled into Bangladesh after August 2017, along with 300,000 to 500,000 who were already in the country from previous refugee outflows from Burma. This presents security, economic, and political challenges for Bangladesh as it seeks to continue its upward development trajectory. The United States has a strategic interest in helping Bangladesh, in coordination with the UN and the rest of the international community, cope with the refugee burden and ensure that the crisis does not destabilize the country or the region, or threaten its continued development. Full realization of the Indo-Pacific strategy goals depend on a Bangladesh that is peaceful, secure, prosperous, healthy, and democratic.

As a traditionally moderate, secular, and stable country, Bangladesh fights (but does not acknowledge) externally-sponsored extremism and is an important partner in the United States' campaign against terrorism. There has been only one successful terrorist attack in Bangladesh since May 2018 and none against Westerners since the July 2016 Holey Bakery attack in the Dhaka diplomatic zone. However, our support to Bangladesh's battle against extremism will remain a top priority since Bangladesh remains a target of ISIS and al-Qa'ida, whose stated goal is to topple the government. Programs in this area will focus on improving the ability of law enforcement to conduct investigation-led operations, increasing the judicial system's capacity to prosecute terrorism cases, strengthening Bangladesh's border security, and preventing recruitment by violent extremist organizations. As one of the largest contributor of forces to international peacekeeping operations, Bangladesh plays a significant role in supporting international peace and security, and we continue to support the Bangladesh military through training, exchanges, and military sales.

Bangladesh is at the nexus of the emerging major trade route of the 21st century, the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor, linking South Asia with China, Southeast Asia and the world. Bangladesh's huge apparel sector, the second largest in the world, sells more of its products to the U.S. market than any other country, and U.S. companies increasingly see Bangladesh as a future market and investment opportunity, especially given the country's enormous infrastructure and energy needs. To achieve its full potential as a major player in the global economy, Bangladesh must strengthen labor rights and work place safety as well as address

serious infrastructural deficiencies, weaknesses in the business enabling environment, and pervasive malgovernance. Bangladesh's continued success is in America's interests, as Bangladesh must create job and livelihood opportunities for the over two million young people who annually join the work force; otherwise, Bangladesh's promising youth demographic dividend could become destabilizing. The United States is a strong partner in assisting Bangladesh both to overcome hurdles to graduating from LDC status and realize the full potential of its talented entrepreneurs.

The upcoming national election that must be held by January 2019 will be the first since the flawed January 2014 parliamentary elections that were boycotted by the main opposition party. The Mission will encourage the ruling Awami League government to live up its commitment to hold a free, fair, credible, and non-violent election that reflects the will of the Bangladesh people. As the ruling party continues to shrink democratic space, we will also endeavor to strengthen the nation's fragile democratic institutions and to bolster its secular, tolerant, and pluralistic traditions. Specifically, we will continue programs to strengthen inter-party dialogue and engagement of youth and women, to reduce the drivers of election violence, to promote independent oversight institutions, and to support watchdog NGOs. Further outreach and leadership development, especially among youth, women, and grassroots community activists, are key to revitalizing Bangladesh's democratic culture and ensuring respect for human rights. We will support efforts to counter trafficking in persons and enable access to justice. We will also continue our robust engagement with the government to address a number of human rights issues, including increasing incidents of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and restrictions on core civil liberties.

With an extremely high population density, Bangladesh's ability to feed itself is key to its stability as well as important to global food security. Mission programs will continue to modernize the agriculture sector and to promote economic diversification and equitable growth. In the labor sector, USAID will improve industrial relations and labor conditions by strengthening the capacity of independent workers' organizations in Bangladesh's two largest export industries: ready-made garments and shrimp and fish processing. These efforts will empower workers to advocate for safe workplaces, fair treatment, legal protection, and greater economic security, ultimately ensuring that Bangladesh's growth is inclusive and supports workers' safety.

Bangladesh has made enormous progress over the past three decades in the health sector. With U.S. support, it reduced mortality of children under five from 146 to 46 deaths per 1,000 births and the total fertility rate from 4.3 to 2.3 births per woman. However, further efforts to improve health and education services are essential to Bangladeshi citizens' economic productivity. Lifelong productivity requires good nutrition, sound health and relevant education.

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Bangladesh's malnutrition rate is one of the highest in the world. Major challenges also remain to reduce unacceptably high maternal and child mortality, improve family planning, and increase access to tuberculosis (TB) services. Despite gains in access to education, the quality of education in Bangladesh remains low and vocational opportunities are limited. The U.S. government also will continue to strengthen Bangladesh's health systems to improve health outcomes and to support Bangladesh's goals to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease outbreaks in support of the Global Health Security Agenda. In education, we will strengthen the provision of early grade reading in Bangladesh's primary education system, including literacy for children with disabilities. We also will build workforce programs for Bangladeshi youth (ages 15-29) to increase their employability. We provide English language training and exchanges to teachers and students through the Access and Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study and Access (YES) programs.

Bangladesh is one of highest-risk countries in the world for natural disasters. Virtually all of Bangladesh is a delta to the highest mountain ranges in the world and only a few feet above sea level. As such, the development of the country depends on its ability to adapt to changing weather patterns and effectively manage its natural resources. Building on USAID's established and effective leadership in this sector, programs will increase Bangladesh's capacity to adapt to and withstand natural disasters, improve management of natural resources, and sustainably develop the energy needed to fuel its economy. Catalytic technical assistance will ensure Bangladesh's readiness to respond to cyclones, floods and earthquakes, while other programs safeguard the sustainability of forests and fisheries and prevent the trafficking of wildlife.

An enhanced management platform is essential to advance the growing U.S. strategic interests in Bangladesh. To meet the heightened security climate, Post is undergoing a compound security upgrade in conjunction with a space renovation project to provide adequate office space. This includes renovation of Post's Consular Section, which is currently the eighth largest immigrant visa processing section in the world, and which provides routine and emergency assistance to an estimated 10,000 U.S. citizen residents and 20,000 U.S. citizen visitors. Guaranteeing Dhaka has adequate staffing remains a top priority, thus Post has requested four new positions to sustain emerging trends, including a refugee coordinator in response to the on-going Rohingya crisis, a Foreign Commercial Officer to nurture a commercial advocacy portfolio of \$16.1 billion and growing, a Prosecutorial Training and Assistance Specialist to focus on strengthening judicial institutions, and a Naval Officer in the Office of Defense Cooperation.

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2. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1: A more peaceful and stable Bangladesh that can better provide for its own security, counter threats to U.S. interests, and serve as a growing contributor to Indo-Pacific and global security.

Mission Objective 1.1: Bangladesh is more capable of protecting its sovereignty, population and borders, counter violent extremism, and meet the challenges of the Rohingya refugee crisis.

Mission Objective 1.2: Bangladesh demonstrates increased support of international principles of freedom of navigation, and maintains or expands security partnerships with the United States and like-minded nations.

Mission Goal 2: Bangladesh is committed to democracy, transparency, pluralism, tolerance, good governance, and respect for human rights.

Mission Objective 2.1: Bangladesh holds free, fair, credible, and inclusive elections, protects vulnerable populations, and ensures civil liberties.

Mission Objective 2.2 (USAID/Bangladesh CDCS DO #1): Citizen confidence in governance institutions increases.

Mission Goal 3: Bangladesh is a healthy, educated, food-secure and climate resilient middle-income country that partners with the United States.

Mission Objective 3.1 (USAID/Bangladesh CDCS DO #2): Food security improved.

Mission Objective 3.2 (USAID/Bangladesh CDCS DO #3): Health status improved.

Mission Objective 3.3 (USAID/Bangladesh CDCS DO #4): Resilience to natural hazards strengthened.

Mission Objective 3.4: Quality of education improved and educational linkages between the United States and Bangladesh expanded.

Mission Goal 4: Sustainable and broadly shared economic prosperity that opens new markets for U.S. firms.

Mission Objective 4.1: Expand inclusive economic growth and increase fair and reciprocal trade and investment.

Mission Objective 4.2: Regional links further developed with India and like-minded partners to support Bangladesh as an open economic hub and stabilizing actor in the Indo-Pacific region that promotes international norms in trade and investment.

Management Objective 1: Enhance Mission Dhaka's physical infrastructure to meet Diplomatic Security and Overseas Building Operations (OBO) mandates to ensure the safety and security of Mission Personnel.

Management Objective 2: Ensure adequate staffing to meet Mission Dhaka's growing engagement with the Government of Bangladesh, increased assistance in the Rohingya refugee crisis, and execution of the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Management Objective 3: Improve Management efficiency and operational effectiveness.

3. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1

A more peaceful and stable Bangladesh that can better provide for its own security, counter threats to U.S. interests, and serve as a growing contributor to Indo-Pacific and global security.

Description and Linkages: This goal helps advance our policy priority of protecting the American people and the homeland. We work to put Bangladesh in the position of being a net security provider rather than security consumer. As emphasized in the National Security Strategy, defeating jihadist terrorists relies on denying these terrorists the ability to operate or recruit anywhere in the world, including Bangladesh.

Mission Objective 1.1

Bangladesh is more capable of protecting its sovereignty, population and borders, counter violent extremism, and meet the challenges of the Rohingya refugee crisis.

Justification:

Bangladesh's security and stability underpins the country's economic and political success. This objective begins with the ability to mitigate terrorism and other forms of crime within its borders. Bangladesh particularly requires a better capacity to conduct investigation-led operations and to develop a sophisticated understanding of its adversaries in order to detect and disrupt them before they are able to act. More broadly, Bangladesh must prevent transnational criminal organizations from propagating their ideology or accumulating personnel or resources. U.S. support aims at buttressing Bangladesh's ability to manage the forced migration of Rohingya refugees from Burma to help preserve Bangladesh's stability. Finally, U.S. assistance and military sales facilitate Bangladesh's significant contributions to U.N. peacekeeping efforts. Failure to achieve this objective may leave Bangladesh less able to govern or sustain its population, threatening its basic stability and thereby our relationship and interests in the region.

Mission Objective 1.2

Bangladesh demonstrates increased support of international principles of freedom of navigation, and maintains or expands security partnerships with the United States and like-minded nations.

Justification:

With improved capacity, Bangladesh has the potential to be a more significant security partner that fosters greater regional stability and helps sustain global peace. As the second-largest peacekeeping contributing country and a nation embarking on a military modernization campaign, investments in Bangladesh's equipment and training readiness pay large dividends to global peace. Finally, to support the Indo-Pacific Strategy, Bangladesh must protect its freedom-of-navigation and ensure equitable access to sea lanes, and promote maritime security to help advance regional integration and trade. Failure to achieve this objective would compromise U.S. relationships and influence in Bangladesh, and by extension, impede the Indo-Pacific strategy. It would also result in a loss of security in regions under the protection of UN Peacekeepers.

Mission Goal 2

Bangladesh is committed to democracy, transparency, pluralism, tolerance, good governance, and respect for human rights.

Description and Linkages: Supporting democracy, good governance, and human rights is a core component of the Indo-Pacific strategy. The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) prioritizes supporting the dignity of individuals, noting that a world that supports American interests and reflects our values will make us more secure and prosperous. Bangladesh's strategic location and its historical example as a pluralistic and tolerant Muslim democracy make it a critical partner. Respect for human rights and democratic processes, in concert with citizen confidence in governance, will reduce political distrust, which is a driver of political violence and radicalization to violent extremism.

Mission Objective 2.1

Bangladesh holds free, fair, credible, and inclusive elections, protects vulnerable populations, and ensures civil liberties.

Justification: U.S. engagement is key to strengthening Bangladesh's respect for civil liberties and tolerance, the foundation of a peaceful, democratic, stable and prosperous partner. Bangladesh's embrace of such principles is not only essential to achieving long-term internal and regional security, but also ensures that free expression, democratic debate, and free and fair elections can take place without the threat of political and communal violence. These principles are strongly tied to efforts to eliminate violence against minorities. Lack of progress on achieving this objective in a Bangladesh where democratic space continues to shrink could increase political instability, including by increasing the vulnerability of disenfranchised populations to exploitation by international terror groups, and could cause a dramatic slowdown in economic progress if unchecked political patronage further replaces economic freedom.

Mission Objective 2.2 (USAID/Bangladesh CDCS DO #1)

Citizen confidence in governance institutions increases.

Justification: Bangladesh faces four inter-related obstacles to effective governance: (1) limited capacity of and political obstacles to nascent democratic institutions; (2) corruption and ineffective mechanisms of transparency and accountability in all branches of government; (3) citizen challenges in accessing justice and the justice system; and (4) the concentration of authority and resources at the national level. For most Bangladeshis, GOB accountability and responsiveness are measured in terms of the delivery of basic services, the level of corruption, the rule of law, and the administration of justice. For the majority of citizens, the most visible forms of governance are local government institutions. Support for increased citizen engagement and effective governance will generate increased demand for democratic practices and better services, which, in turn, will culminate in improved accountability and responsiveness to citizen needs, thereby increasing citizen confidence in governance institutions. Failure to achieve this objective would result in economic and political instability due to the further decrease in citizen confidence in government institutions as well as diminished respect for the rule of law stemming from adverse public reaction to government corruption.

Mission Goal 3

Bangladesh is a healthy, educated, food-secure and climate resilient middle-income country that partners with the United States.

Description and Linkages: Mission Goal 3 focuses on building the capacity of Bangladesh in the core areas necessary to achieve its self reliance. Programs under Goal 3 support Pillar I of the 2017 National Security Strategy, the Global Health Security Agenda, State-USAID Joint Strategic Goals [1.4], 2.2, 3.4, and South and Central Asia (SCA) Joint Regional Strategy Goals 4.2 and 6.2. To become self-reliant, Bangladesh must effectively deal with natural disasters and rising sea levels. It must improve its public and private health systems and service delivery and be capable of preventing, detecting, and responding to infectious disease outbreaks that have international implications. It must continue to improve agricultural productivity and diversify its economy. It must also accelerate progress in education quality to build the skilled work force necessary to sustain its development trajectory to self-reliance.

Mission Objective 3.1 (USAID/Bangladesh CDCS DO #2)

Bangladesh's food security improves.

Justification: Bangladesh faces three inter-related obstacles to the availability of, access to, and utilization of food: (1) insufficient agricultural productivity to keep pace with population growth; (2) the inability of the poor to buy adequate food; and (3) diets overly reliant on rice and lacking diversity. A high rate of productive employment generation is essential for Bangladesh to achieve sustainable, broad-based economic growth and the household income

levels required for food security. At the same time, it is critical to promote the nutritional understanding requisite to diversified, balanced diets essential to combat malnutrition. Addressing constraints of availability, access, and utilization of safe and nutritious food will lead to positive outcomes for health and income security. Failure to improve food security will increase the risk for political and economic instability, potential exploitation by nefarious actors and U.S. competitors, and the need for additional U.S. resources to mitigate those risks.

Mission Objective 3.2 (USAID/Bangladesh CDCS DO #3)

Bangladesh's health status improves.

Justification: Bangladesh has made great progress in reducing child and maternal mortality, fertility rates, and improving nutritional status of children in the past two decades. However, problems remain as the country looks to the next phase of its health sector development in order to achieve Universal Health Coverage and meet the requirements of the International Health Regulations. Strengthening and expanding the country's comprehensive approach to reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health and detection and treatment of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis remain high priorities for the GOB. Resources and capacity are often stretched thin with the increase in demand for complex health services due to ongoing demographic and epidemiological changes. USAID and CDC will continue to advocate for increased domestic resources on Bangladesh's road towards self-reliance while strengthening the Government's capacity to improve efficiencies in the health sector, quality services, and expand equitable access. Failure to improve Bangladesh's health status increases the risk of global pandemics, poor health outcomes, and reduced economic performance that would negatively affect U.S. interests in the region and may result in the need for additional U.S. resources to mitigate those risks.

Mission Objective 3.3 (USAID/Bangladesh CDCS DO #4)

Resilience to natural hazards strengthened.

Justification: Bangladesh is among the world's most vulnerable countries to climate change, the most vulnerable to tropical cyclones, and the sixth most vulnerable to flooding. Population growth and economic development have led to extreme deforestation (one of the lowest per capita rates of forested land combined with one of the smallest protected areas in the world) and an acute demand for electric power generation. Improved management of natural resources, livelihood diversification, climate risk management, low emissions development, and greater use of clean energy resources will improve Bangladesh's ability to adapt to and mitigate for the impact of global climate change, conserve biodiversity, and provide sustainable economic benefits. Failure to strengthen resilience to natural hazards increases the risk of political and economic instability by threatening Bangladesh's food and health security, and may require additional U.S. resources to mitigate those risks.

Mission Objective 3.4

Quality of education improved and educational linkages between the United States and Bangladesh expanded.

Justification: Despite notable progress in expanding access to education, the quality of education in Bangladesh remains low. The quality of instruction in the early grades is insufficient to guarantee basic literacy skills after five years of primary education. Weak teacher capacity, poor curricula, and limited access to English-language resources in higher grades prevent students from acquiring the critical thinking and language skills needed to participate in job markets and constrain key industries in Bangladesh. Improvements to the quality of basic education, especially in early grade reading, will provide students the foundational skills to succeed in school and the workforce. Additionally, strengthened ties between Bangladesh and the United States through educational, academic, cultural, and professional exchanges will provide new educational and economic opportunities for Bangladeshi youth. Failure to achieve this objective may create the risk of slower economic growth in Bangladesh, strengthened influence by nefarious actors and U.S. competitors, and the need for additional U.S. resources to mitigate those risks.

Mission Goal 4

Sustainable and broadly shared economic prosperity that opens new markets for U.S. firms.

Description and Linkages: A growing and prosperous Bangladesh creates opportunities for the fair and transparent export of U.S. goods and services while enabling the country to develop using its domestic resources, provide employment opportunities for the millions of Bangladeshi youth, and deter growing threats within Bangladesh and in the region. This goal supports the State-USAID Joint Strategic Goals 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 3.1 and the South and Central Asia (SCA) Joint Regional Strategy Goals 1, 2 and 3. This goal also supports Pillars II and III of the 2017 National Security Strategy.

Mission Objective 4.1 - Expand inclusive economic growth and increase fair and reciprocal trade and investment.

Justification: With an average annual growth rate of 6.1 percent, the GOB and business sector are increasingly interested in creating an environment to improve productivity and attract investment. USG programs target inclusive growth through private sector partnerships, entrepreneurship development, promoting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and agribusiness, improving access to finance, and improving productivity and income generation potential of small farming households. USG also advocates for Bangladesh to meet international standards for economic empowerment of workers that can ensure that economic growth is not achieved at the expense of worker safety and labor rights. Failure to expand inclusive economic growth and increase fair and reciprocal trade and investment limits

Bangladesh's ability to attract foreign investment and hinders further economic growth, thus decreasing opportunities for U.S. exports to Bangladesh.

Mission Objective 4.2 - Regional links further developed with India and like-minded partners to support Bangladesh as an open economic hub and stabilizing actor in the Indo-Pacific region that promotes international norms in trade and investment.

Justification: Increasing Bangladesh's regional and international connectivity would provide greater stability to a critical region and open opportunities for U.S. investors. Bangladesh is poised to become an economic hub that connects South Asia to Southeast and East Asia, creating mutually beneficial trade and investment links between the country and its regional and U.S. commercial partners. The United States encourages regional cooperation to maintain free and open seaways, transparent infrastructure financing practices, unimpeded commerce, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. Failure to improve Bangladesh's regional ties hinders economic growth and leaves the country isolated and vulnerable to influence by actors that are less compliant with international best practices.

4. Management Objectives

Management Objective 1

Enhance Mission Dhaka's physical infrastructure to meet Diplomatic Security and Overseas Building Operations (OBO) mandates to ensure the safety and security of Mission personnel.

Justification: The current physical infrastructure supporting Mission Dhaka is already beyond full capacity and cannot sustain additional growth. In 2014, USAID funded a complete renovation of their office space but already has completely outgrown the existing layout. The current compound structure does not meet current Department standards for security as well as OBO structural requirements, thus requiring enhancements.

Management Objective 2

Ensure adequate staffing to meet Mission Dhaka's growing engagement with the Government of Bangladesh, and increased assistance in the Rohingya refugee crisis and execution of the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Justification: Due to the need for increased engagement with Bangladesh resulting from the Rohingya crisis and implementation of the Indo Pacific strategy, Mission Dhaka's staffing is not sufficient to meet current Mission requirements. For example, the Rohingya crisis requires specific skillsets and resources that Post does not have. As the Bureau responsible for refugee issues, PRM has already established a NSDD-38 for a new position. However, similar new positions to address other priorities, such as the 950% increase in the value of Mission Dhaka's commercial advocacy portfolio, have not been established. Post will need to re-examine priorities and resources to realign accordingly.

Management Objective 3

Improve Management efficiency and operational effectiveness.

Justification: Due to manpower shortfalls over the last several years, Post has focused on increasing automation to streamline processes and create efficiencies. ICASS worldwide has emphasized better data collection for more informed decision making on Management resource allocation. Post is following this model by concentrating on improving utilization of myServices and other reporting mechanisms. Combined with Management Objective 2 -- ensuring adequate staffing -- establishment of a management platform in Cox's Bazar would allow for better and more efficient use of Mission resources.