



# CENTER FOR ENTERPRISE AND SOCIETY

# BILATERAL EXCHANGE TRIP REPORT

## JULY 13, 2023

### INTRODUCTION

The Bilateral Student Exchange Program is a part of the ongoing CES, ULAB project titled “Building Resilient Universities Project” (BRUP), funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The project is currently in its fifth phase and the bilateral exchange program is a part of the current phase. CES is implementing the “Building Resilient Universities Project” (BRUP) to engage students and alumni of various universities in promoting diversity and tolerance.

The purpose of this exchange of ideas is to imbue values of diversity, tolerance, and pluralism by allowing Bangladeshi and Indian students to understand the roots and background of these aspects in both countries, and the challenges to these impulses in the two countries.

CES (Center for Enterprise and Society) is a leading university-based think-tank located at ULAB. CES is dedicated to generating high-quality research and knowledge that serve to connect the theoretical and empirical aspects of enterprises and society.



Over the past five years, CES has successfully implemented a project funded by NED, focusing on promoting diversity and pluralism through a wide range of activities.



C-SAS (Center for South Asian Studies) at ULAB is a thought platform that promotes research, dialogue, advocacy, and knowledge dissemination in collaboration with diverse stakeholders from government, NGOs, academia, the private sector, and media in Bangladesh, South Asia, and beyond.

CES and C-SAS have joined forces to facilitate dialogues on minority and tolerance issues between Bangladesh and India through three (3) knowledge sharing sessions and workshops. The NED funded initiative is spearheaded by Sajid Amit, Director of CES, and Sudeep Chakravarty, Director, C-SAS.

## **BILATERAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM**

### **Event 1 | Workshop at JNU by Sudeep Chakravarty: Bangladesh Singularly Plural: The Perception and Realities of a Rainbow Nation**



#### **PROFILE OF THE GUEST:**

**SUDEEP CHAKRAVARTI, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, ULAB**

Sudeep Chakravarti at present Director of the Center for South Asian Studies (C-SAS) at University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, where he also teaches conflict studies, ethics, South Asian literature and journalism. He is the author of nine books that variously encompass history, ethnography, conflict and conflict resolution, geopolitics, geo-economics, and the intersection of democracy and development.

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### **EVENT DESCRIPTION:**

The first of the bilateral student exchange program was held at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, on February 24, 2023. Sudeep Chakravarti was the inaugural guest of the first bilateral exchange event, where he delivered a talk at the Centre for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. The title of this launching event was “BANGLADESH: SINGULARLY PLURAL: The Perception and Realities of a Rainbow Nation”. It was a hybrid session where students from Jawaharlal Nehru University participated in face-to-face classroom discussion while students from ULAB joined virtually via zoom.

In his talk, Mr. Chakravarti discussed on the relationship between India and Bangladesh and the complexities that exist between them owing to various political and economic factors. During his talk, the speaker elaborated that while historical strife and current politics do contribute to the existing tensions, other practical factors such as shared geostrategic needs and increasing interactions between people and businesses have helped improve relations.



On the topic of Bangladesh, Mr. Chakravarti also touched on the misunderstandings and stereotypes that still exist in the country owing to the religious and ethno-linguistic conflicts coupled with a push for aggressive national pride.

The speaker concluded that despite these challenges, both Bangladesh and India see themselves as diverse, tolerant, and pluralistic while growing and maturing as nations. The talk addressed these issues with the speaker reiterating his attempt to separate the actual problem of intolerance in Bangladesh from its people at large who still abide by an ingrained secularism and progressive practices.

### **EVENT OUTCOME:**

During the first bilateral student exchange event, Mr. Sudeep discovered that Indian students had gained a more profound understanding of the community and minority issues prevailing in Bangladesh. Similarly, the students in Bangladesh, who participated remotely, acquired knowledge



about the plight of minorities in India, realizing the shared challenges faced by both nations. Notably, these students' newfound awareness not only kindled their desire to delve deeper into the subject matter but also compelled them to extend support to the minority communities within their respective homelands. We also observed a network is being created as the students of both the countries are reaching out to each other through social media, such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter after the talk. By leveraging these digital platforms, students from India and Bangladesh are forging meaningful connections, transcending geographical boundaries, and utilizing their shared knowledge to bring about positive change.

## Event 2 | Workshop at ULAB by SAUGATA BHADURI: India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States



### PROFILE OF THE GUEST:

**DR. SAUGATA BHADURI, PROFESSOR, JNU, NEW DELHI**

Saugata Bhaduri is Professor at the Centre for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has served as Visiting Professor at many universities and colleges in Europe, UK, and the USA, and has been recipient of several international research grants and awards. His areas of research interest include the cultural history of colonial Bengal, literary and cultural theory, popular culture, and translation and comparative literature studies.

### EVENT DESCRIPTION:



Dr. Saugata Bhaduri, Professor at the Center for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University was the guest speaker of the next bilateral student exchange program which was held at the University of Liberal Arts

Bangladesh under the aegis of the Center for Enterprise and Society (CES) ULAB, on March 6, 2023. The title of the second event was “India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States”: Of Unity in Diversity and Diversity in Unity.

Quoting from the very first article of the Constitution of India in its title, in this talk the speaker elaborated on how India has been envisaged not as a monolithic nation-state but as a ‘union’ of diverse states, and thus, resultantly, of people belonging to diverse languages, religions, ethnicities. Dr. Bhaduri first touched on how regardless of the apprehension concerning the marginalization of linguistic, religious, and ethnic minorities within its territories, the idea of India still seems to work very well, and pretty much within this dialectics of unity and diversity.

The speaker then discussed on what it is that has made India work well despite its unique levels of diversity both in language and ethnicities. Whether it is the 'unity in diversity', where, despite their differences, Indians sense a fundamental unity binding them all together. The talk basically explored the relationship between unity and diversity and how they complement each other. It also focused on the ethical ways of treating others with hospitality, tolerance, and solidarity to continue living with conflict and maintain the whole idea that is India.

### **EVENT OUTCOME:**

Through his engaging and thought-provoking discussion, Dr. Bhaduri adeptly conveyed the significance of recognizing and appreciating the myriad cultural, linguistic, and religious differences that exist within India. The lecture served as a



catalyst for the students' profound comprehension of the concept of unity in diversity, compelling them to reflect upon the shared values and principles that underpin India's pluralistic society. Armed with this newfound knowledge, the students at ULAB are now equipped to navigate the complex landscape of India's diverse society with a deeper understanding and appreciation. They have gained insights into the historical, social, and political factors that have shaped India's journey as a union of states, fostering a sense of unity amidst diversity. This enhanced understanding not only broadens their perspective but also equips them with the tools to contribute meaningfully to the discourse on unity and diversity in India.

## Event 3 | Workshop at ULAB by Ghazala Wahab: Born a Muslim: Home Truths about India's Pluralism



### PROFILE OF THE GUEST:

**GHAZALA WAHAB, AUTHOR, EDITOR OF FORCE**

Ghazala Wahab is an award-winning author, and Editor of FORCE, a magazine that specializes in defence and security issues began her career at The Asian Age. She is the author of Born a Muslim: Some Truths About Islam in India, published in 2021). The book has won two major Book of the Year (non-fiction) awards in South Asia: Tata Lit Live and AttaGalatta. She has written extensively on matters of regional security and is a columnist. Before launching FORCE in 2003, Ms. Ghazala worked in the Delhi bureau of The Telegraph.

### EVENT DESCRIPTION:

Ghazala Wahab was the guest speaker of the last last bilateral student exchange program titled “Born a Muslim: Home Truths About India’s Pluralism”. It held at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh with the support of the Center for Enterprise and Society (CES) ULAB on March 13, 2023.



Ms. Wahab during her talk discussed how India is currently undergoing a deliberate effort to reshape itself as a nation that is very inclusive and diverse, with attempts to rebrand itself as accommodating and celebratory of different cultures all while the Indian Muslim population stays being systematically marginalized. The speaker then explained how it is now necessary to understand how this rebranding movement has taken shape by taking account of the mutual ignorance and mutual prejudice to further shed light on contemporary realities of India.

Ms. Wahab reiterated that it is important to understand this movement and its implications through scholarly analysis and personal anecdotes in order to reclaim India's true identity, while being a nation that celebrates diversity and inclusivity.

## EVENT OUTCOME:

Ms. Ghazala's insightful talk at the bilateral exchange event shed light on India's deliberate efforts to reshape itself as an inclusive and diverse nation, while systematically marginalizing the Indian Muslim population. The session had a profound impact on students of ULAB, equipping them with a deep impartial view on the



experiences of Muslims in India and gained insights into their challenges due to political suppression. The session allowed students to explore India's pluralistic society and understand the struggles and aspirations of Indian Muslims. Students are actively seeking more information to enrich their knowledge, using various platforms to broaden their perspectives. They now possess empathy and solidarity with Indian Muslims, aspiring to contribute to their improvement and foster a tolerant society.



## **CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

The bilateral exchange program involved two neighboring nations: Bangladesh and India. Consequently, meticulous planning was required for hosting seminars at both JNU and ULAB, featuring three distinguished speakers. Given the sensitive nature of the topics and the existing biases and preconceived notions surrounding the Hindu communities and the complex dynamics between India and Bangladesh, it was crucial to design the event and content with prudence. The project team thoroughly deliberated on the promotional materials for social media and the discussion content, ensuring they would not be interpreted as derogatory by any communities in either Bangladesh or India.

Despite the challenges, all three bilateral exchange programs were successfully executed, with highly interactive events for both the speakers and students. Two seminars were hosted at ULAB, featuring prominent speakers from India.

As there were preconceived notions and biases among some communities and cross-country relations, bringing 2 guest speakers from India required careful consideration. The project team took a critical and careful pathway in crafting the promotional materials and discussion content to avoid any derogatory implications in Bangladesh or India.

The attending students provided positive feedback; expressed their interest in participation in future events involving speakers from a wider range of countries. The participants obtained a greater appreciation for and understanding of challenges related to diversity and pluralism in their neighboring country. They understood that these challenges are cross-country and allowed them to appreciate their own minority communities better. This was possible of course because just the way Hindus are a minority in Bangladesh, Muslims are a minority in India. Therefore, Muslim Bangaldeshi students got a better appreciation of their own minorities once they began to understand how majoritarianism works. For future exchange programs during the subsequent phases of the project, a variety of guest speakers could be invited who could offer their expertise and knowledge on crucial yet sensitive topics as such.



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