



**REMARKS OF PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY
OF STATE FOR SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS
ALICE WELLS
AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE IN DHAKA
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Thank you all for coming as I conclude a productive trip.

Bangladesh is critical to the United States in so many ways—we enjoy a robust trade and investment relationship, close cooperation on counterterrorism and peacekeeping, a strong development partnership, and extensive people-to-people ties.

Bangladesh, located at the crossroads of South and Southeast Asia, is also central to the administration’s Indo-Pacific strategy. It was evident in my meetings with government officials that the United States and Bangladesh are very much aligned in our visions for a free, open, rules-based, and interconnected region.

With its impressive growth and focus on development, Bangladesh has made tremendous strides in reducing poverty from over half of the population to less than a third. The United States has supported Bangladesh’s steady progress toward its goal of graduating from LDC status by 2024. Bangladesh also has potential to serve as a regional hub for trade and commerce between South and Southeast Asia and as an anchor for stability and prosperity in the Bay of Bengal region.

In recognition of Bangladesh’s valuable role in supporting our Indo-Pacific strategy, we recently announced that we will be providing Bangladesh with \$40 million in Foreign Military Financing to enhance its coastal radar system, modernize and enhance its patrol boat fleet, and provide training in support of expanded maritime interdiction – all part of our Bay of Bengal Initiative.

With a dynamic and fast-growing economy, Bangladesh’s future success will be fueled by a strengthening of its democratic institutions and governing structures. That is why, as I conveyed in my meetings, we continue to call on the Government of Bangladesh to protect fundamental civil liberties – especially freedom of speech and press – and fulfill its commitment to hold free, fair, credible, and participatory elections that reflect the will of the Bangladeshi people.

Turning to my time in Cox's Bazar district, I profoundly felt the scope and enormity of the Rohingya refugee crisis. I want to personally thank the Government and the people of Bangladesh for their continued generosity in responding to this humanitarian crisis and for their efforts to ensure assistance reaches the affected population.

I was also impressed by work of the UN and non-governmental organizations that are on the front lines receiving new refugee arrivals, distributing food, providing educational and other enrichment activities to Rohingya children, and much more.

And I was struck by the strength and resiliency of the refugees themselves, who are finding ways to maintain their identities and communities as they grapple with the atrocities they experienced and witnessed.

The United States is committed to assisting Bangladesh in responding to this crisis, and we have provided more than \$345 million in humanitarian assistance specifically in Bangladesh since August 2017.

We continue to call on the government of Burma to create the conditions necessary for the Rohingya to return voluntarily to their former places of residence in Burma in safety and with dignity. Toward that end, we continue to urge the government to fully implement the Annan Commission recommendations, including recommendations related to access to citizenship and freedom of movement, and we offer our help in doing so. We also continue to call for accountability for those responsible for the violence in the Burmese security forces.

So those are some of the key themes and messages of my visit, but I'd be happy to answer some of your questions.

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**As prepared for delivery*
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