

Contributor Profile: Bangladesh

Rashed Uz Zaman and Niloy Ranjan Biswas
University of Dhaka

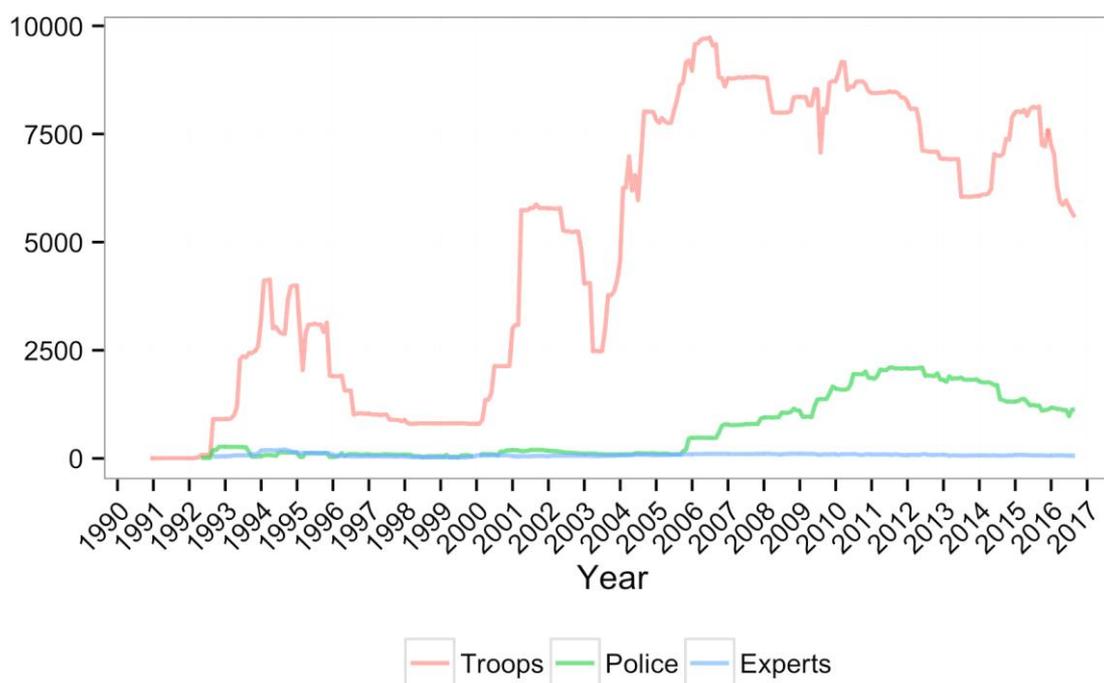
Active Armed Forces ¹	Helicopters	Defense Budget ²	Uniformed UN Peacekeepers	UN Contribution Breakdown	Other significant deployments
157,050 World Ranking (size): 32 Army 126,150 Navy 16,900 Air Force 14,000 (Paramilitary 63,900)	Total: 23 14 Multi Role: 12 Mi-17 <i>Hip H</i> ; 2 Mi-17-1V <i>Hip H</i> (VIP) 9 Transport: 3 Mi-171Sh 6 Light Range (2 Bell 206L <i>Long Ranger</i> ; 4 Bell 212)	2015-16: \$2.25bn (1.1% of GDP) 2014-15: \$1.96bn (1.4% of GDP) 2013-14: \$1.87bn (1.3% of GDP) 2012-13: \$1.58bn (1.5% of GDP)	6,772 (196 female) (31 Aug 2016) (82% armed forces, 17% police, 1% observers) Ranking: 4 th	MINUSTAH: 418 (300 police, 112 troops) UNMIL: 12 (4 experts, 4 police, 4 troops) UNOCI: 252 (7 experts, 140 police, 105 troops) UNAMID: 729 (7 experts, 279 police, 373 troops) UNFIL: 276 troops MONUSCO: 1,908 (7 experts, 279 police, 373 troops) UNMISS: 513 (6 experts, 23 police, 484 troops) MINUSMA: 1,553 (136 police, 1414 troops) MINURSO: 25 (5 experts, 20 troops) MINUSCA: 1,073 (11 experts, 1073 troops)	None
Defense spending / troop: US\$12,459 (compared to global average of approx. US\$79,396).					

Part 1: Recent Trends

Bangladesh is a leading provider of UN peacekeepers, having participated in 54 missions in over 40 countries. In August 2016, Bangladesh had 5,572 troops, 61 military experts and 1,139 police personnel deployed in various UN peacekeeping operations. In the last two and a half decades, Bangladesh's troop contributions have increased about 500% (see figure 1). The armed forces contributed 85% of this figure and the police 15%. 130 Bangladeshi uniformed peacekeepers have died while serving under the UN flag (see table 1). A battalion of 850 soldiers from Bangladesh will replace Kenyan peacekeepers in response to a UN request to fill the gap in the [UN Mission in South Sudan \(UNMISS\)](#). In addition, Bangladesh also started processing another request of the UN to send [an engineering company of 260 personnel](#) from the Bangladesh Army for operations in Wau region of South Sudan.

Table 1: Bangladesh in UN Peacekeeping Operations (54 missions in 40 countries)

	Army	Navy	Air Force	Police	Total
No. of Peacekeepers (completed missions)	119,452	3,875	5,218	<u>16,798</u>	145,343
Deceased peacekeepers	103	3	4	<u>20</u>	130

Figure 1: Bangladesh Uniformed Personnel Contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations, 1990 - 2016

The Bangladesh police force first contributed to UN peacekeeping in 1989 through the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia. Since then Bangladeshi police officers have participated in all the major peacekeeping missions where the UN has deployed police. Between 2000 and (August) 2016, there has been a 1500% increase in the number of Bangladeshi police personnel in UN missions, surpassing 2,000 officers in 2011. These have deployed as individual police experts and Formed Police Units (FPU) in East Timor, DR Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan, South Sudan, and Haiti. Bangladesh contributed 196 female police officers and is considered to be the top performer in this regard as of August 2016. In July 2016, the UN Secretary General appointed [Major General Humayun Kabir of Bangladesh Army](#) as the Force Commander of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). Furthermore, in February of this year, Bangladesh sent a 56-member medical contingent to the UN Operations in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) under the leadership of the [first ever female contingent commander of Bangladesh Army, Colonel Dr. Nazma Begum](#). In March 2015, [Bangladesh contributed a 140-strong Formed Police Unit](#) to Darfur, Sudan. Bangladesh deployed [its first naval contribution to](#) a UN mission in 2005 when a naval contingent was sent to Sudan. In 2010 Bangladesh Navy took a big step when [it agreed to participate in the Multinational Maritime Task Force](#) in the Mediterranean Sea: a naval frigate and an offshore patrol vessel to the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL). On May 12, 2014, [two naval war ships BNS Ali Haidar and BNS Nirmul joined the UNIFIL](#) mission along with 320 sailors and naval officers. They replaced BNS *Osman* and BNS *Madhumati* who have been patrolling the Mediterranean Sea from 2010 to 2014 as part of the mission mandate.

Part 2: Decision-making Process

Bangladesh sends troops and police personnel to UN missions based on a generic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in December 2007 as part of the UN Standby Arrangement System (UNSAS).

The [Government of Bangladesh \(GoB\) plans to formulate a national peacekeeping strategy](#) to boost its policymaking role and streamline its field contributions at the UN missions. However, as of now, the military tends to monopolize tactical decisions about Bangladesh's participation in UN peace missions and the civilian authority has not challenged this prerogative. The decision-making process usually starts when Bangladesh receives a request for peacekeepers from the UN Secretariat. Dhaka's Permanent Mission at the UN receives this request on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and examines it in light of Bangladesh's broader foreign policy priorities and existing international commitments. The Defense Attaché in the Permanent Mission in New York deals with the bureaucratic procedures and subsequently forwards the requests to the relevant agencies in Bangladesh. Requests relating to troops are directed to the Armed Forces Division (AFD), which is the coordinating headquarters of the Army, Navy and Air Force. The Overseas Operations Directorate deals with peacekeeping operations in the Army Headquarters in Dhaka.³ Requests for naval and air force components are transferred to the respective Navy and Air Force Headquarters in Dhaka, which then issue necessary directives for the upcoming operations. For troops, the Overseas Operations Directorate issues the necessary instructions to all other concerned branches of the armed forces for the requisite preparations. This involves the selection of personnel and the provision of equipment and training. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) receives requests related to the deployment of the police personnel for the UN missions. After the initial notification, the MoHA transfers the order to Police Headquarters in Dhaka to take decisions on the selection of personnel.

Part 3: Rationales for Contributing

Political and Security Rationales: Bangladesh's checkered political history plays an important role in explaining the country's active participation. The bloody and painful separation from Pakistan helped create an army that was heavily politicized due to its participation in the war of 1971. This politicization resulted in the military taking control of the state between 1975 and 1990. Only in 1990 was democracy restored. However, this did not mean a complete end to the military's involvement in politics. The army remains one of the country's most powerful actors. Bangladeshi political parties have welcomed the military's involvement in peacekeeping because they believe participation in such missions will imbibe the Bangladesh Army with democratic values and lead to healthier civil-military relations at home. Further, participating in UN missions with active support from development partners like the United States enhances Bangladesh's profile in regional and global forums.

Economic Rationales: Bangladesh has moved to low-middle income developing country club in July 2015 with a [gross national income per capita of \\$1,314](#). Despite considerable economic progress over the last two and a half decades, Bangladesh still struggles to cope with a very high population density and limited economic resources. This encourages the government to look for economic opportunities abroad and explains why UN compensation rates for peacekeepers are attractive to Bangladeshi soldiers and police. The financial benefits accrued by Bangladeshi peacekeepers thus play an important role in supporting the economy. Official sources indicate that during 2001-10, the government received \$1.28 billion from the UN as compensation for troop contributions, contingent-owned equipment, and other forms of compensation.⁴ In 2012-13, the [Bangladesh Armed Forces earned \\$72 million](#) from its peacekeeping operations. The [Bangladesh Police have reportedly earned BDT40 billion \(\\$513 million\)](#) in the last two decades from the same sources. UN peacekeeping helps the Bangladesh Army to purchase and maintain military equipment that it would not be able to obtain under normal circumstances and to reward its personnel. UN peacekeeping may also

produce other indirect economic benefits through facilitating contracts in new markets for Bangladeshi businesses, especially in the pharmaceutical and agricultural sectors. (One example is Bangladeshi entrepreneurs leasing land in African countries to establish farms to help meet the food requirements of both Bangladesh and the host countries.)

Normative Rationales: Bangladesh has constantly reiterated its commitments to the principles of the UN, including the maintenance of international peace and security. Providing UN peacekeepers allows Bangladesh to promote a positive image of the country abroad. In her address as a co-chair of the [September 2015 UN peacekeeping summit in New York](#), Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed her administration's further commitment to UN peacekeeping endeavors and assured the international community that strong and steadfast contributions from Bangladesh will continue. In an October 2016 inter-ministerial conference hosted by France, the [UN Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Harvey Ladsus](#) praised Bangladesh's resolute support to UN peacekeeping missions in Francophone areas. [The Economist](#) observed in 2007, donning blue helmets gave Bangladeshis the chance to be known for something other than bad politics and natural disasters.

Institutional Rationales: As noted above, the military usually plays the major role in decisions about Bangladesh's participation in UN peacekeeping and it has strong institutional reasons for contributing. First, peacekeeping allows Bangladeshi soldiers to interact with foreign armed forces and improve their professional skills. Such multinational exposure helps them gain operational expertise and first-hand knowledge of the latest doctrines and military equipment. Second, peacekeeping helps finance equipment and weapons platforms that might otherwise be out of reach. Third, peacekeeping enhances the military's professional skills through language training, increased inter-personal skills, and by providing opportunities to interact with foreign troops in military tasks. Finally, peacekeeping has promoted institutional development at home. To cater for increasing demand for trained peacekeepers, the Bangladesh Army has established the [Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operations Training](#) (BIPSOT), a prestigious facility that provides training to foreign and Bangladeshi personnel. BIPSOT has benefited from active support provided by United States and other Western countries and helps strengthen the professional image of Bangladesh Army hosting world-class training institutions.

Part 4: Barriers to Contributing

Difficult domestic politics: This is not a barrier to Bangladesh's peacekeeping contributions. The two major political parties of Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), have strongly supported UN peacekeeping despite disagreements on most other issues. Even leftist political parties, which are usually vocal about Western countries and the pernicious impact of their policies on states like Bangladesh, do not criticize Dhaka's involvement in UN peacekeeping. However, political leaders must be careful not to antagonize Bangladesh's majority Muslim population. It would have been very difficult, for instance, for Bangladesh to participate in the mission in post-invasion Iraq even with the UN's authorization.

Civil society groups and academics in Bangladesh have not focused much attention on matters related to UN peacekeeping. Only a few articles⁵ have raised critical questions about the potential influence of such missions on Bangladesh's politics, especially with regard to civil-military relations. The domestic power of Bangladesh's military prevents any serious opposition to its participation in UN peacekeeping. So far, political actors are content to let

the armed forces participate in peacekeeping in the hope this will neutralize any potential praetorian desires.

Part 5: Challenges and Issues

UN peacekeeping has had an enormous impact on Bangladeshi defense institutions. The Armed Forces now accommodate peace-based modules and post-war state-building components in its training discourse. By nature such modules focus on “human” rather than simply “national” security and combat roles. They therefore pose a challenge for more traditionally oriented sections of the military.⁶ After 25 years of UN peacekeeping, some argue that [Bangladesh Armed Forces need to balance](#) their role as peacekeepers with more traditional national defense tasks. So far, little or no thought has been given to how the transformation brought on by peacekeeping has impacted the capacity of the Bangladesh Armed Forces to carry out traditional combat missions.

Peacekeeping has also influenced defense budgeting and procurement. In January 2013, the Government of Bangladesh concluded an arms deal worth US\$ 1 billion with Russia. The deal includes purchase of large-bodied Mi-17 helicopters, combat trainer aircraft, pontoon bridges, armored personal carriers and anti-tank missiles. The Armed Forces Division of Bangladesh Army pointed out this purchase was crucial for Bangladesh’s peacekeeping missions and it was also mentioned that the UN had suggested Bangladesh procure modern weapons for its peacekeepers operating in troubled regions of the world where armed groups often use advanced weapons compared to those used by Bangladeshi troops.⁷ Undoubtedly, some of these new acquisitions will ensure the necessary logistical support to Bangladeshi contingents in UN missions. However, such procurements may face significant challenges with adverse consequences for civil-military relations. The Government’s defense purchases are often not transparent and may lead to questions about Bangladesh’s role in UN peacekeeping missions. It should be pointed out that Transparency International, an international watch dog against corruption, has recently identified Bangladesh as of the 15 countries with high risk of corruption in defense purchase.⁸ Moreover, while justification for the arms deal has been linked with UN peacekeeping missions, analysts point out participation in such missions does not provide any convincing argument for purchase of Russian arms and other complex rationales are at work.⁹ Also, the Government finds additional money for the defense budget by ignoring other priority sectors. This could adversely influence the country’s overall economic development. In addition, the Armed Forces Division has not developed future plans for this expensive equipment beyond its immediate use in UN peacekeeping.

Although there is wide consensus that participation in UN peacekeeping will reduce praetorian aspirations in the Bangladesh armed forces, during the 2007 political crisis the army indirectly intervened to topple the caretaker government and install its preferred alternative interim government. The military actively supported the formation of a non-political cabinet to create a level-playing field for the political parties. The army was not neutral and the whole act was a [reminder of the fragility of civilian rule](#). Although parliamentary elections eventually took place, the army’s role proved deeply divisive and reinvigorated debate about its place in domestic politics. It is notable, for instance, that the civilian legislature’s control of the military has diminished, as reflected in the inactive role of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defense Affairs.¹⁰ Moreover, the presence of military personnel in the civilian administration has not declined sharply from the authoritarian era of 1975-90. The outcome is a blurring of the traditional division between civil and military institutions.

Another question involves the desire of members of paramilitary forces like the Bangladesh [Ansar and Village Defence Party \(VDP\)](#), and [Border Guard Bangladesh \(BGB\)](#) to participate in UN peacekeeping along with their colleagues from the Bangladesh Armed Forces and the Police. [Government has started an initiative](#), however, until now this has not been successful. The Government's reluctance may cause disaffection, which may adversely affect performance of these paramilitary organizations in the long run.

Financial issues will also continue to impact the future of Bangladeshi peacekeeping. At the micro level, it is notable that financial gain has become the primary reason why many join the military.¹¹ This could be seen as a type of brain-drain that captures precious (often educated and trained) human capital in the military service. Participation in UN missions also seems to be more lucrative than serving on any other assignment, and officers often leave or retire early after completing a UN mission.¹² Furthermore, the money they earn contributes to the overall remittance flow, and hence, strengthens the national economy. Nevertheless, the impact of UN peacekeeping on the national economy is hard to quantify. Interviews with former peacekeepers suggest that UN earnings were normally spent in non-productive sectors, for example, in consumption goods and real estate, or invested in small and medium enterprises, and stock markets.

There is also the troubling issue of peacekeeping becoming mired in the domestic politics of Bangladesh. One of the leading opposition parties (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) alleged that police activities against opposition party could have an adverse impact on Bangladeshi police personnel's deployment on UN missions.¹³ The government, meanwhile, strenuously denied such a scenario can materialize and pointed out that the number of Bangladeshi police officials were on the rise.¹⁴ Nevertheless, given the zero-sum nature of Bangladesh's politics, Bangladesh's participation in UN peace missions needs to tread carefully lest it gets tainted by partisan politics.

The issue of [sexual abuse by some Bangladeshi members](#) of UN peacekeeping missions surfaced after a report on such acts being perpetrated by UN peacekeepers in the Central African Republic was made public by the international media. Government of Bangladesh reiterated its policy of zero tolerance of such acts and announced an investigation has been launched into the matter and anyone guilty of such acts will be dealt with in an appropriate manner. The [government's firm stand on this matter](#) was highlighted when the Prime Minister speaking to the graduating class of Defense Services Command and Staff College (DSCSC) requested the armed forces to closely monitor Bangladesh's troops in UN peacekeeping missions and ensure they do not tarnish the country's image.

Finally, [allegations](#) that the Bangladesh security forces might have engaged in extrajudicial killings of ethnic minorities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and elsewhere raise questions about the military's compliance with international human rights standards, which could affect future participation in UN missions. In the 13th session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) held in New York in May 2014, an International CHT Commission activist urged DPKO to develop a mechanism to "[strictly monitor and screen human rights records](#)" of members of the Bangladesh Armed Forces before they are permitted to participate in peacekeeping operations. A [July 2014 report of the Asian Centre for Human Rights \(ACHR\)](#) raised the issue of human rights violations against certain members of the armed forces for their involvement in extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances.

Part 6: Key Champions and Opponents

There is little critical public debate in Bangladesh on its contribution to UN peacekeeping. Despite ideological differences, political parties across the spectrum view Bangladesh's contribution as a great source of national pride. The [Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies](#) (BIISS), a top think-tank of the Bangladesh Government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has hosted conferences and published papers highlighting Bangladesh's participation in peacekeeping. In January 2016, Bangladesh established a [Peacebuilding Center \(BPC\)](#) with the aim of playing a more constructive role in promoting global peace. It is expected the Peacebuilding Center will tap into Bangladesh's vast reservoir of peacekeeping experience and train individuals who may wish to contribute further in strengthening peace and security.

The burgeoning electronic and print media in Bangladesh are known for their critical views on many issues but they have seldom raised critical questions with regard to UN peacekeeping. It is more common for special reports to highlight positive work done by Bangladeshi peacekeepers.¹⁵

Part 7: Capabilities and Caveats

A well-trained, professional Bangladesh military that is eager to participate is a significant capability for in UN peacekeeping. This is enhanced by widespread domestic support for such participation. The Government of Bangladesh and the armed forces are also clearly willing to procure new equipment specifically for its participation in peacekeeping operations. Further, Bangladesh draws attention as an exemplary case for its [all-female peacekeeping unit](#) in Haiti and it commits more women peacekeepers upon needs from the UN.

Bangladesh would find it difficult to take part in peacekeeping missions that did not generate popular support among its Muslim-majority population. While the existing technical capability of the Bangladesh Armed Forces is not outdated, it is not adequately equipped to face heavily-armed opponents in extremely demanding missions. Technology, according to the [2015 High Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations \(HIPPO\)](#) report, remains a key challenge for the major contributors of the peace missions. The GoB and armed forces are yet to formulate a clear plan how they would address this issue in future. Moreover, as peacekeeping missions increasingly seem to be leaning toward [anti-terror operations in parts of Africa](#), it will be interesting to see how Bangladesh adapts to such robust missions and how Bangladesh's people will react to fatalities which may result from such missions. In addition, decision-making pertaining to UN peacekeeping missions rests firmly with the Bangladeshi military. There is a longer-term risk that as UN peacekeeping becomes a more multidimensional enterprise requiring more civilian contribution, Bangladesh's major role in it will be diminished.

Part 8: Further Reading

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- R. Zaman & N. Biswas, "Bangladesh" in A.J. Bellamy & P.D. Williams (eds.), *Providing Peacekeepers: The Politics, Challenges, and Future of United Nations Peacekeeping Contributions* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise stated, data is drawn from IISS, *The Military Balance 2016* (London: IISS/Routledge, 2016), pp.211-306, DOI:10.1080/04597222.2016.1127567

² Budget figures and calculations are drawn from "[Sentinel Security Assessment - South Asia](#)", *Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments*, 11 April 2012. 2012-13 budget is cited from "[Tk 145.655b defence allocation proposed](#)," *The Financial Express*, 7 June 2013. The 2014-15 budget is cited from IISS, *The Military Balance 2015* (London: IISS/Routledge, 2015), p. 232. The 2016 budget is cited from IISS, *The Military Balance 2016* (London: IISS/Routledge, 2016), pp.211-306.

³ The Overseas Operations Directorate was set up in 2005 in order to free the Military Operations Directorate from the added responsibility of UN missions for the Bangladesh Army. Authors' communication with DPKO officer, January 2012.

⁴ 'Role of BD Armed Forces in UN Peacekeeping Missions', restricted Bangladesh Army document (no date, anonymous author).

⁵ Two noteworthy academic exercises can be found in <https://mpr.ub.uni-muenchen.de/24312/> and <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13533312.2014.938913>.

⁶ Authors' interview with a serving officer of Bangladesh Army, Dhaka, April 2, 2012.

⁷ "[Arms deal with Russia crucial for UN Peacekeeping: Army](#)," *The Financial Express*, 22 January 2013.

⁸ Transparency International, *Government Defence Anti-Corruption Index 2013* (London: Transparency International UK, 2013), www.ti-defence.org (accessed 1 February 2013).

⁹ Stephen Blank, "[What Do Russian Arms Sales to Bangladesh Mean?](#)" *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 10, Issue. 17, 30 January 2013.

¹⁰ See Syed Imtiaz Ahmed, "Civilian Supremacy in Democracies with 'Fault Lines': The Role of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence in Bangladesh," *Democratization*, 13:2 (2006), pp.283-302.

¹¹ A Bangladesh Army officer elaborated further on this matter when he pointed out that participation in UN peace missions' times leads to venality among some officers who became too involved with money-making ventures like investing in shares, buying real estate. Such activities, at times, tend to divert officers away from soldiering and hamper the professionalization of the military.

¹² Authors' communication with DPKO officer, January 2012.

¹³ "[Close podium or face Dhaka march, says Khaleda](#)," *The New Age*, 16 March 2013.

¹⁴ "[Hasina warns Khaleds against bloodshed](#)," *bdnews24.com*, 18 March 2013.

¹⁵ See, for example, Ilyas Iftekhar Rasul, "[International Day for UN Peacekeepers](#)," *The Daily Star*, May 29, 2011; Staff Correspondent, "[Bangladesh to bolster peacekeeping missions President lauds peacekeepers on Int'l Day](#)," *The Daily Sun*, May 30, 2012; "[Dhaka largest troops-contributor to UN missions Int'l Day of UN Peacekeepers today](#)," *The New Age*, May 29, 2011; Brig Gen Md. Abdul Hakim Aziz, psc, "[Heroes beyond national frontiers](#)," *The Daily Star*, June 18, 2011.