

Dhaka can help build bridge between Muslim world, US

Says US Under Secretary

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh and the US have significant opportunities to work together to make a bridge between the Muslim world and the USA as the Obama government is taking major steps to that end.

Visiting US Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Judith McHale said this in an interview with UNB chief of correspondents Shamim Ahmad here yesterday.

She disclosed that there will be an entrepreneur summit in April this year in Washington, bringing young entrepreneurs from the Muslim world to create new access to business, while in March there will be a meeting of religious leaders in Dhaka.

Besides, the new US government is trying to expand its education program and access to English education, science and technology for those who are interested to avail the scope.

"I think there are significant opportunities to work together and I am absolutely convinced that these are the issues that will strengthen both of our positions," she said.

McHale, who came here on a three-day official visit, said Bangladesh, given its moderate approach and philosophy of moderation, will be an increasingly important ally of the United States in the days ahead.

"During my stay here for couple of days and discussions, I focused on how we could actually work better together to address this very difficult issue."

Asked about any change in the situation after President Obama's historic speech in Cairo last year, McHale said definitely, the Muslim community around the world has

been encouraged by the speech, especially the young people who find a new opportunity to work together on variety of issues and building a bridge of knowledge and understanding.

"You know it is not easy; it's hard to do, it's hard to build new relationship. We're working on new ways to reach out to the people," she said.

The Obama administration is deeply committed to fulfilling all the words of the Cairo speech, she added.

Asked whether she discovered anything new here during her visit, McHale said she has been struck by the way Bangladesh is growing with dynamism, economy and a sense of optimism and spirit of moving forward.

Obviously, she added, there are many significant challenges and people here seem to be optimistic about their future and ability to face those challenges.

McHale was asked about any opportunity for Bangladesh to be an economic partner of the United States as US Congressmen recently termed Bangladesh a close ally of America.

She said "I am very encouraged to have the partnership between Bangladesh and the USA in many areas".

And she appreciated Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's initiatives and commitment to democracy and the rule of law. McHale also praised Hasina's recent visit to India setting up new agenda in the region.

Asked about the critical challenges for Bangladesh, the US foreign office functionary said education, food security, global health, climate change and counter terrorism are the challenges, which require all to

work together to address.

She noted Bangladesh has potential of natural gas reserve that might be used to address the energy issue and provide new source of income.

McHale said Bangladesh premier and her government seem to be going down very good on the positive path. "So, there are exciting possibilities to strengthen ties between the two countries."

Asked about Bangladesh's long-running demand for duty-free access to the US market, she said President Obama is very clear about the understanding of the international trade and he will continue to support this.

About the US cooperation in securing Bangladesh's land and maritime boundary, she said security is an important issue that not only affects Bangladesh but also the region and the entire world, which needs continued cooperation from all to deal with.

Stressing the need for higher studies by Bangladeshi students in the USA and vice versa to establish deeper ties, McHale said her country wants to increase the number of Bangladeshi students to the United States to 20,000 a year from the current figure of 2,700.

She said more students from Bangladesh to the US are to ensure the future generation and help forge ties between the two countries.

Asked about the possibility of President Obama's visit to Bangladesh, McHale would not speculate about it.

The president has got very complicated schedules, she said.

About Secretary Hillary Clinton's visit to Dhaka, she however said she would directly speak to Clinton and encourage her to come to Bangladesh.



Artists sing the national anthem during a cultural programme marking the Amar Ekushey at the Central Shaheed Minar in the city yesterday. Sammilita Sangskritik Jote organised the event.



BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia speaks at a view exchange meeting with editors and senior journalists of different national dailies, news agencies and TV channels at the Lakeshore Hotel in the city yesterday. (Story on Page 1)

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