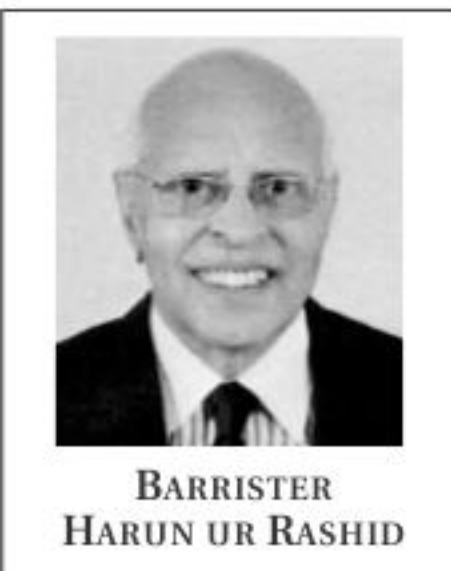


BOTTOM LINE

Significance of Salman Khurshid's visit



INDIA'S Minister of External Affairs Salman Khurshid will pay a two day visit to Dhaka on February 16-17 for twin purposes.

He will attend the second meeting of the India-Bangladesh Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) as envisaged in the 2011 Indo-Bangladesh Framework Agreement on Cooperation for Development. (Its first meeting was held in New Delhi on May 7 2012 in which the Bangladesh foreign minister participated).

The second purpose is to prepare for the proposed trip of the Bangladesh prime minister to India in August at the invitation of her counterpart Dr. Manmohan Singh.

After a period of lull in bilateral relations, it is good to note that brisk activities between the two countries have commenced. The following issues need to be addressed:

- Agreement on water-sharing of the Teesta River;
- Implementation of land border agreement with India signed on September 6, 2011, involving exchange of enclaves and adverse possession of territories;
- Stopping the killing of Bangladeshi nationals along the border with India;
- Removal of concerns on the proposed Indian Tipaimukh dam;
- Increase of Bangladesh trade with India;
- Relaxation of conditions of the \$1 billion Indian loan;
- India's agreement to sub-regional connectivity.

The president of India is likely to visit Dhaka in early March. India's foreign secretary visited Dhaka and held

discussions on February 10 with his Bangladesh counterpart.

On February 1, the Indian power secretary agreed to provide 250MW power to Bangladesh by July this year. The long overdue extradition agreement was signed between the two countries during the Indian home minister's visit to Dhaka on January 28-29.

In my view, two most important issues need to be settled prior to the visit. The first one is the Teesta water- sharing agreement which has been stalled since September 2011 because of opposition from West Bengal state.

The second one is the Land Border Agreement with exchange of enclaves and adverse possession of territories, which was held up because of reservation of opposition parties in India. Since it needs amendment of the Indian Constitution, the New Delhi government has faced difficulties in ratification through the Parliament.

Border killing of unarmed Bangladeshi nationals by Indian security force (BSF) arouses passions and angst in Bangladesh. India's home minister reaffirmed that India would bring down the killing to zero level in his talks with the Bangladesh foreign minister during the recent visit. Hopefully, his message will go down to BSF which routinely kills, abducts and torture Bangladesh nationals at the border. A culture of impunity prevails for BSF, says Kirity Roy, head of Manabadhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM), a Kolkata-based human rights organisation.

The proposed Tipaimukh Dam will be in one of the most seismically volatile areas on earth. In the light of broader ecological, hydrological and social costs of large dams, various institutes, academics, affected peoples' groups and civil society in Bangladesh expressed concern about the adverse impact on Bangladesh. At the second two-day meeting of the sub-group of Bangladesh-India Joint Rivers Commission in Dhaka on February 1 and 2, Dhaka asked Delhi to provide more information to assess the possible negative impacts downstream.

Trade imbalance for Bangladesh with India continues to be huge. It is reported that Bangladesh's official imports from India during 2010-11 stood over \$4. 5 billion while Bangladesh was able to export about \$512 million. Besides formal trade, informal imports from India stand at another \$2 billion annually.

Although India removed 46 items from the sensitive list relating to garment industry in 2011, removal of non-tariff and para-tariff barriers (including unnecessarily strict regulations) by India is imperative. Such a step is likely to increase Bangladesh export to \$1 billion, if not more, to India per year, which would not cause a ripple on the big Indian economy in the context of its imports of \$485 billion in 2011-12.

Bangladesh agreed to transit/transshipment with India, Nepal and Bhutan through its territory. Although India agreed to allow Bangladesh to use its territory for trade with Nepal and Bhutan, transit/.transshipment through Bangladesh from Nepal and Bhutan cannot operate in the

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absence of India's agreement to use its territory.

At the first meeting of JCC in New Delhi, the foreign ministers constituted technical-level teams for sub-regional cooperation in water and power and connectivity and transit, and agreed to convene the first meeting of the teams at an early date. Despite request to India for the first meeting by Bangladesh, no meeting has yet taken place.

With regard to the \$1 billion loan with condition of supply 80% of the project materials from India, Bangladesh's request for relaxation of the conditions reportedly remains unfulfilled. Furthermore, during his visit in May 2012, the then Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee announced that India would convert \$200 million of the \$1 billion as grant, and has been released as such.

Whether bureaucrats of New Delhi or state governments are responsible for the delay, the ultimate responsibility rests on the national government of India. It is reported that the Indian foreign secretary assured Bangladesh side on February 10 that both the Teesta and the border agreements would be concluded "within the shortest possible time." But Bangladesh has not seen such assurances translated into action in the past.

Dhaka moved quickly to address Delhi's concerns on cross-border terrorism and transit/transshipment to the North-East, given the proper infrastructure in place for it. Transit on experimental basis was provided to India by Bangladesh in 2011.

Hopefully, the Indian external affairs minister's visit will help in resolving pending bilateral issues. Many friends of India in Bangladesh think that it would be a missed opportunity if India failed to deliver the promised goods prior to Bangladesh prime minister's proposed visit to India in August.

The writer is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Korean Ambassador to Bangladesh Lee Yun-young, who presented his credential to President Zillur Rahman on October 23, recently talked to The Daily Star's Diplomatic Correspondent Rezaul Karim about 40 years of Korea-Bangladesh ties, recruitment of Bangladeshi workers, Korean priorities and other issues.

Following are excerpts from the interview.

The Daily Star (TDS): South Korea and Bangladesh have enjoyed very good bilateral relationship since establishment of diplomatic relations 40 years ago. How do you foresee this relationship foster further in days to come?

Lee Yun-young (LYY) Korea and Bangladesh are enjoying excellent bilateral relationship in all fronts. Bilateral relationship was further strengthened after the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Korea in May 2010. Trade between our two countries reached \$1.9 billion in 2011, which was 11% increase from the previous year, and it remained stable in 2012 despite the worldwide recession. Investment has diversified recently; not only in garments but also in infrastructure such as power plant, R&D sector and business service.

I find more and more Korean companies showing interest in Bangladesh market. Although I have been working in Bangladesh only for a few months now, I met many Korean businessmen who had visited Dhaka not only to conduct ever-increasing ODA programmes but also to find new business/investment opportunities. Bangladesh is the second largest recipient of Korea's soft loan, next to Vietnam. Also, we have significantly increased our development grant to Bangladesh.

Finally, we need each other's cooperation in the international arena, including in UN, and in climate change and security, more than ever before. For example, Korea assumes the chair of UN Security Council this year and hosts the Secretariat of Green Climate Fund.

In every sense, our relations are going to multifaceted partnership in a mutually beneficial and healthy way. I am quite satisfied with the direction in which we are heading.



Ambassador Lee Yun-young

found jobs in Korea. Under our EPS, around 1,500 to 1,700 Bangladeshi workers go to Korea and get jobs every year.

The actual number may seem relatively low to some people, but I would like to emphasise that the Bangladesh workers in Korea are getting far better salaries than in most other countries, and there is no discrimination at all between Korean workers and foreigners in not only salary but also working conditions and welfare. Our government believes that the quality of work and providing good working conditions for foreign workers is far more important than the number of jobs we are providing.

Our EPS is based on government-to-government system. Every recruitment process is taken care of by the two governments; therefore, there is no room for intervention by private recruitment companies or brokers. We introduced this system for two reasons; to prevent corruption and to minimise the fees paid by workers. The system has been praised as an excellent model worldwide.

As Ambassador, I would very much wish to see more Bangladeshi workers go to Korea. In order to do that, the problems associated with illegal immigrants from Bangladesh have to be addressed. Those who are working in Korea under the EPS have to go back to their own country after 5 years. It is important that these people actually go back to their own countries since the quota for each country depends very much on the percentage of illegal immigrants. Another point is that selection of workers from 15 Asian countries depends on the employers.

There is one more thing which I'd like to draw your attention to. Korean companies which have a lot of projects in Middle-East region are recruiting a sizable number of Bangladeshi workers. One company operating in Iraq will import up to 50,000 workers from here.

TDS: You have been in Dhaka for about three-four months as Ambassador, how do you see Bangladesh?

LYY: I have to say that I am overwhelmed by the warm reception I got from the Bangladesh people. I was able to make many Bangladeshi friends in a very short period of time. I found that there are a lot of similarities between the two countries in many respects. Koreans and Bangladeshis both like spicy food and cultural activities, and there is also some remarkable resemblance between Korean and Bangladesh languages. Because of these similarities in people and culture, I am settling down in Dhaka without any difficulties.

Not only do we share something in common in both languages, the two countries are also similar in a sense that we do not have oil or other natural resources that are often very helpful to the economy. Instead, both of us have to rely on our human resources. Ever since I arrived in Dhaka, many people asked me what made Korean economy successful. I would not hesitate to say that it is the people of Korea, well-educated human resources that have played a leading role in developing our economy during past fifty years. The Korean government recognised the importance of human resources development, especially in the areas like heavy industries and IT, from the very early stage, and has invested a huge amount of money in order to promote it. I am confident Bangladesh is following similar paths to become a "Bengal Tiger" in the near future.

TDS: As the new Ambassador, what are the priorities you plan to emphasise during your assignment here?

LYY: It is a difficult question. I would have to say that everything about the relationship between Korea and Bangladesh is equally important to me. If I have to mention, however, I'd like to note that, as I said before, our friendship should be diversified into new areas such as culture and tourism. Second, I will continue to explore and pursue new opportunities to our mutual benefit by raising visibility to each other. I intend to keep myself busy to accommodate all needs from all Bangladeshi people who have interest in Korea, every member of the Korean community in Bangladesh, and Koreans who are exploring opportunities in Bangladesh. I would like to be an Ambassador who can promote our "friendship" to "brotherhood." I am a great fan of Bangladesh, our natural partner.

Thief nabbed by giant banana



A Thief was captured by a cop dressed as a giant banana.

A part-time police volunteer named Luke Summerhayes was recently doing his day job, working at a supermarket in the UK.

As part of his duties, he was dressed as a giant banana. (I've worked at supermarkets, and believe me, this is not the worst thing you have to do.)

Suddenly the shoplifting alarm went off!

Luke did not have time to take off his costume.

He just raced after the thief as he was, flying across the shop in his two-meter-tall banana rig.

The villain was proceeding at a steady pace across the car park when a giant banana raced out of nowhere and arrested him.

Luke told reporters afterwards: "He looked pretty surprised." (This line may put him in the running for "Understatement of the Decade".)

The story, recorded in the UK's tabloid press, was forwarded to me by reader Sunita Chau, who said: "Observers must have been in 'peels' of laughter, ha ha ha."

Groanworthy puns aside, I can see this as the beginning of a real-life superhero saga.

But first, Luke needs some banana-powers. Perhaps he could have some sort of banana-skin firing gun that makes criminals slip and fall. And a speedy banana-mobile crime-fighting car shaped like a banana-split dish. And a trusty assistant called plantain. The TV series could be called Go Bananas.

Talking of crime, robbery victims are increasingly defeating villains by simply ignoring them, according to the latest items sent in for my Dumb Criminals File.

In one recent case, a would-be robber walked into a bank and demanded cash.

The teller said: "Sorry, this window is closed."

The robber apologetically moved away to a teller window which was actively serving customers.

The second teller pointed out that there was a queue, telling him he had to "wait in line" to rob the bank.

In the queue, a customer scolded the man for not lowering the hood of his hoodie indoors. Unwilling to adjust his hoodie, the harassed villain gave up and left the bank in the US city of Boston, the *Boston Globe* reported.

I recall a similar incident happening in Hong Kong. A man stormed into a bank in Kowloon and announced he was robbing it. Staff declined to empty the vaults, explaining that they were far too busy for that kind of thing.

Last week in Holland, a masked man entered a bar and leveled a gun at people inside.

Too busy drinking and chatting, they ignored him. The whole thing is on YouTube, including the deflated robber's sad exit.

Moral of these tales: You need personality to be a robber. It's not for everyone.

One more legal story: a US woman whose children were taken from her by social workers demanded US\$900 trillion in compensation last week. (That figure is not a misprint.)

Critics say the fact that Fausat Ogunbayo, 46, thinks time with her children is worth all the money in the world shows she is mentally unstable.

I think it shows that she's the only person around whose values are on target.

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