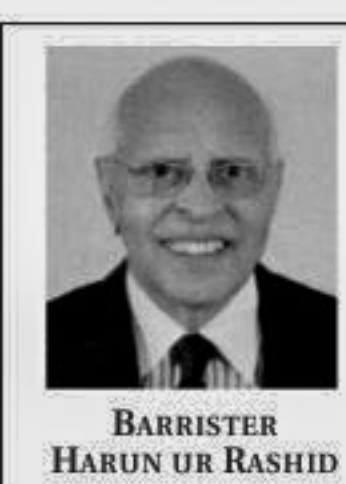


BOTTOM LINE

# Mukherjee's first Dhaka visit as president



BARRISTER HARON UR RASHID

**P**RESIDENT Pranab Mukherjee is scheduled to arrive in Dhaka in early March on a two-day visit to Bangladesh at the invitation of the president and the prime minister of Bangladesh. He is the first Bengali to become the president of India since its independence in 1947.

It will be his first visit to Bangladesh as president, which is a testimony to the existing excellent cooperative partnership between the two neighbours.

President Mukherjee is highly respected in Bangladesh, not only as president but also as a person.

He is known to be modest, affable and polite and could easily relate to any person.

President Mukherjee has close family connections with Bangladesh through his wife Madam Shuvra, who hails from Sadar upazilla of Narail district.

President Mukherjee is no stranger to Bangladesh.

During the 1971 War of Liberation, he was one of the political leaders who supported and assisted the provisional government of Bangladesh.

He will receive "Bangladesh Swadhinata Sammanona" (Bangladesh Freedom Honour) a state honour for his outstanding contribution to the Liberation War.

It is noted that Bangladesh AL-led government started honouring foreign friends for their contribution to the country's liberation war in 2011, when the government conferred Bangladesh Swadhinata Sammanona upon former prime minister of India late Indira Gandhi. Her daughter-in-law and Congress President Sonia Gandhi received the honour on her behalf on July 25, 2011.

The presidency is mainly a ceremonial role, but Mukherjee used his acceptance speech to talk about the basic needs of the poor. He reportedly said: "There is no humiliation more abusive than hunger. Trickle-down theories do not address the legitimate aspirations of the poor. We must lift those at the bottom."

Currently, Bangladesh and India share a cooperative partnership which is considered as crucial to the

prosperity of both countries. Relations between India and Bangladesh have been on the upswing ever since Sheikh Hasina took power in 2009. Prime Minister Hasina visited New Delhi in January 2010 and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was in Dhaka in September 2011.

All visiting Bangladesh ministers, including Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury, who visited India in July 2012, have met President Mukherjee. A delegation of Bangladesh lawmakers who visited India in November as part of Track 2 diplomacy also met the president. Opposition Leader Begum Khaleda Zia called on him at the Presidential Palace in October 2012.

**India needs Bangladesh as much as Bangladesh needs India in the current regional and global environment. Given the desire to live together in cooperation, the two countries should proceed with productive relations through unremitting efforts.**

In recent times, brisk activities have commenced in various sectors through the visits of Indian ministers and top officials. Both sides have been working together to promote pragmatic cooperation in terms of closer economic cooperation and cultural exchanges, and made breakthroughs in some other sectors including power.

It is reported that India will be able to release 92% of the \$800 million line of credit to Bangladesh for infrastructural development, for which interest was cut down to 1% last year as a gesture of goodwill. Out of the 13 projects to be implemented through the loan, it is reported that nine agreements have been signed and tender documents are being processed for the remaining four.

As a veteran Congress politician he held a string of influential portfolios in the government, including commerce, finance, defence and external affairs, over two decades of national reforms. He visited Bangladesh several times in various capacities and had established close rapport with top Awami League leaders.

His last visit as finance minister was on May 5-6 of last year to attend the concluding session of Rabindranath Tagore's 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary celebration. During the visit, he announced that India would write off \$200 million dollars of the one billion loaned to Bangladesh for various projects.

In pursuance to the declaration, India's External Affairs Minister, Salman Khurshid, while visiting Bangladesh this month, handed over a cheque of \$50 million on February 17 to the Prime Minister Hasina.

There is speculation that the Bangladesh government may take the opportunity of the visit to discuss two most important outstanding issues with the president. The first one is the Teesta water-sharing agreement which has been stalled since September 2011 because of opposition from the 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.

On February 21, President Mukherjee, while addressing the Parliament, advocated the passage of a constitutional amendment bill in Parliament to make the Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh effective.

It is reported that the bill has been introduced in the Lower House (Lok Sabha). Hopefully, the Congress-led government will be able to receive support from its opposition parties to obtain two-third majority in the both Houses (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) of Parliament for amendment of the constitution.

It is believed that the resolution of the pending two most important issues will lead not only to the restoration of credibility of India's promises but will also facilitate the proposed visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India in September.

India needs Bangladesh as much as Bangladesh needs India in the current regional and global environment. Given the desire to live together in cooperation, the two countries should proceed with productive relations through unremitting efforts.

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

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

# Institutional mechanism for addressing loss and damage



SALEEMUL HUQ

**T**HE eighteenth Conference of Parties (COP18) of the United Nations Framework

Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held in Doha, Qatar in December last year, ended a day late after a marathon 48 of hours non-stop negotiations amongst the developed and developing countries on a range of critical issues. One of these so-called "crunch" issues was how to address Loss and Damage from Climate Change.

The small island developing states, who negotiate under the umbrella of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), have been pushing this agenda item for many years with little success as the developed countries routinely blocked any discussions on the topic. The reason for the latter's reluctance to take up the topic is that it might open the door to questions of liability and compensation (which are taboo subjects for the rich countries). This is the story of what happened on loss and damage at Doha.

The compromise language of "loss and damage" (as opposed to "liability and compensation") was agreed at COP16 in Cancun, Mexico in December 2010 as part of the Cancun Adaptation Framework which established a Work Programme on Loss and Damage. This was further elaborated in COP17 in Durban, South Africa in December 2011 where a one-year set of workshops and consultations was put in place to report back for a decision in COP18 in Doha in December 2012.

**Doha discussions**  
The discussions in Doha revolved around the demand from AOSIS, with strong backing from the Least Developed Countries (LDC) Group and the Africa Group, for an "International Mechanism on Loss and Damage" to be established in Doha. This was fiercely resisted by the developed countries, led by the United States of

America, who argued that there was no need for a separate track of discussions or decision on "loss and damage" as it was nothing new and could be discussed under the existing adaptation tracks.

This deadlock persisted through an all-night negotiating session on the second last night through the entire final day and into the night after the COP was meant to close. At about 2 am on the last night (after almost 36 hours of non-stop negotiation) the head negotiator from the United States suddenly turned up in the "loss and damage" negotiating group (until then it was being handled by a mid-level

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member of the US delegation) to see what all the fuss was about.

The AOSIS and LDC Group had to scramble to get their ministers and heads of delegation into the room to face the US head of delegation. The ministers from AOSIS, as well as those from the LDCs, stood together and told the US that they were prepared to go home from Doha with nothing if they didn't get what they wanted on "loss and damage," and they further said that they would blame the intransigence of the US delegation for Doha's failure.

**Doha gateway**  
In the face of this steadfast resolve from the vulnerable countries the US backed down and agreed the package of decisions that came to be known as the "Doha Gateway" with the crucial passage on "loss and damage" as follows:

"9. Decides to establish, at its nineteenth session, institutional arrangements, such as an international mechanism, including functions and modalities, elaborated in accordance with the role of the Convention as defined in

paragraph 5 above, to address loss and damage associated with the impacts of climate change in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change."

One of the reasons that the US backed down was the fact that at the very same time as they were negotiating in Doha, the states of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut together with the city of New York were presenting a bill of \$80 billion for "loss and damage" from hurricane Sandy that had hit the northeastern coast of the United States some weeks before. So the developing countries (and US journalists in

Doha) rightly asked the US if they could have "loss and damage" at home, why couldn't they allow it at the international level?

**Bangladesh's role**  
The Bangladesh government, and the delegation at the COPs, as part of the LDC Group, has been playing a leading role on this topic, right from getting the original Cancun

decision to facing down the US in Doha with our negotiators being in the negotiating room non-stop for over 48 hours. Bangladesh hosted a crucial meeting of the LDC Group just after Durban where the Group prepared themselves to tackle "loss and damage" in earnest.

The government of Bangladesh also initiated a major year-long international research project on behalf of all the vulnerable countries which was able to contribute with knowledge and evidence to support the negotiators from AOSIS and LDC Group in Doha.

Bangladesh is also now in a position to lead the thinking about the "international mechanism" which has been agreed at Doha. Perhaps a first step would be for Bangladesh to think about setting up a "national mechanism" that could then lead to an "international mechanism."

The writer is Senior Fellow at the London based International Institute for Environment and Development, and Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, Bangladesh. E-mail: Saleemul.huq@iied.org

# Focus on safety and security of garment workers

MAHMUDA IMAM

**T**HE readymade garment sector has been a boon for Bangladesh.

Bangladesh enters 2013 with a firm footing as the world's second largest garment exporter, raising hopes for a new wave of business despite turbulent times in some parts of the globe. The World Trade Organisation declared Bangladesh as the second largest RMG exporter after China in 2010-2011 when the country's export grew 43.36% to \$15.66 billion in spite of global recession in 2007-2008.

Bangladesh retained its position in the following fiscal 2011-2012 by exporting garments worth \$19.09 billion. The outlook for the current fiscal is set to exceed \$20 billion. Bangladesh now claims 4.8% of the global RMG trade of \$412 billion. According to McKinsey and Company, an International Management Consulting firm, Bangladesh apparel exports will reach \$36 billion by 2020.

But all these prospects appear to have been shaken by a fire tragedy on November 24, 2012, at Tazreen Fashions LTD, where 112 workers died according to official count. Most people who work in the industry come from poor families and have dependents in varying numbers to support. On January, 27, 2013, the Smart Garment fire at Mohammadpur took the lives of seven garment workers and injured 20.

What will happen to the injured? Approximately 33 major fire incidents at garment factories resulted in tragic end of 500 lives. The reasons behind this are bad workmanship of factory buildings, inadequate number of exits, closure of gates, lack

of safety measures, narrow road obstructing fire service operation and lack of rescue equipments. The factory owners make their factories without safety measures and keep doors locked during a fire.

The government is constitutionally bound to protect the lives of the people while owners of factories have legal and moral duty to ensure safety of workers. The safety of life is an inherent right guaranteed by Articles 31 and 32 of the Constitution. In short, Article 31 guarantees right to life while Article 32 prohibits action which is detrimental to life, body or property. Death of people in the name of industrialisation cannot be accepted.

Business organisations like BGMEA, BKMEA and FBCCI did not take adequate measures to ensure safety of workers in case of accident.

Whenever any incident takes place, the government and the affected organisations mourn the deaths and show some activity. After some days, their promises do not result in actions.

The buyers are now pressing factory owners to improve working conditions, hike wages of workers and ensure labour rights and other compliance issues. Following the event, many International non-government organisations campaigned for restricting

purchase of Bangladeshi garments until the garment factory owners here ensure workers' safety and labour rights.

The apparel sector may face some hurdles this year unless the issues of proper

the global market. Bangladesh enjoyed quota-free status till 1985. Now Bangladesh is not only a supplier of basic garments, but also a major exporter of high-end apparel items.

Export Promotion Bureau data show that RMG sector's contribution to the country's exports was 3.9% in fiscal 1983-1984. Now it stands at nearly 80%.

At present, the sector employs 3.5 million workers, 80% of whom are women. The constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights to women and men, and laws are in place to safeguard women's rights. One example is the 2006 Bangladesh Labour Law, which protects the fundamental rights of women workers, including the right to maternity leave. At the international level, Bangladesh has ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as well as ILO Convention 111 on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation.

It seems that we are either unable or unwilling to learn from our mistakes. After the inferno at Tazreen Fashion, the BGMEA and several government agencies came out with pledges of taking actions against factories that would be found guilty of non-



NOOR ALAMY/DRINK NEWS

**Safety and security for garment workers is a burning issue. So, the government's response is welcome. But we are looking forward to a time when adequate measures will be in place and their implementation will be ensured.**

working environment, better wages and labour rights are resolved. Several factors such as availability of cheap labour, quota facility, cash incentives against export, and entrepreneurial skills have helped the RMG sector grow since the country's entry into

The writer is a human and women's rights activist.