



## Ministry of External Affairs

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## Press Statement by External Affairs Minister during her visit to Bangladesh (October 22, 2017)

October 22, 2017

Your Excellency, Foreign Minister, Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali,  
Distinguished members of the Bangladeshi delegation  
Friends from the media

At the outset, I would like to thank the Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Bangladesh for the warmth of the welcome and hospitality extended to me and my delegation. This is my second visit to Bangladesh as External Affairs Minister of India, the first being my first stand-alone overseas visit since assuming office. It is always a pleasure to be here in Bangladesh.

Friends, India attaches the utmost importance to its relations with Bangladesh. Our partnership today touches upon virtually all areas of human endeavour. Our relations are based on fraternal ties and are reflective of an all-encompassing partnership based on sovereignty, equality, trust and understanding that goes far beyond a strategic partnership.

Our discussions today in the course of the 4th Joint Consultative Commission have been extremely useful. Even more important is the atmosphere of trust and understanding in which we carried out our discussions. We discussed the common challenges that we are faced with today. One such challenge is that of terrorism, extremism and radicalization and we will continue to fight this scourge together and along with other like-minded countries. We are both determined to protect our societies from the threat of ideologies of hate, violence and terror by adopting a zero tolerance policy and a comprehensive approach in fighting violent extremism and terrorism at all levels.

We also discussed various aspects of our bilateral relations and reviewed progress on key initiatives and decisions, including those taken during the recent visit of Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh to India. We are satisfied with progress achieved in areas such as trade and investment, security, connectivity, border management, power, energy, shipping, people to people exchanges, to name a few.

Friends, India has been a long-standing and reliable development partner of Bangladesh. Totally, three lines of credit amounting to USD 8 billion have been extended by India to Bangladesh so far. This is by far the largest development assistance that India has extended to any country worldwide. We are confident that this credit will be invaluable to Bangladesh as it pursues its developmental priorities, especially in the areas of infrastructure development.

In addition, India has also been extending grant assistance for small socio-economic projects in Bangladesh. In

the past three years alone, 24 such grant projects have been completed which include construction of students' hostels, tube-wells, cultural centres, orphanages etc. Presently 58 projects, including city development projects in Rajshahi, Khulna and Sylhet, are under implementation. Tomorrow, we will launch another 15 projects in the areas of education, health, culture and community development.

Our cooperation in the power and energy sector is a source of immense satisfaction to both of us.

We have achieved a great deal, only because of the friendship between us and our understanding that neighbours must help each other. India is now supplying 660 MW of much needed power to the Bangladesh people and this figure will double, if not triple, in the foreseeable future. We will work together as founding members of the International Solar Alliance, for which Bangladesh has just confirmed its accession. This Alliance is expected to make solar energy affordable by aggregating demand, promoting universal access to energy and networking R&D.

The oil and gas sector is another sector in which we are confident that the initiatives that we have jointly identified will yield immense benefits to both our peoples. We have already agreed on the construction of a petroleum products pipeline that will link Siliguri with Parbatipur, for the benefit of the people of north western Bangladesh, as a grant in aid project. Other visionary ideas under consideration include the setting up of LNG terminal, supply of natural gas by pipeline and investments in the upstream sector.

A significant area of our cooperation is our quest to increase connectivity through restoration of pre-1965 links encompassing road, rail, water and coastal shipping links. This has brought our peoples closer than ever before. The frequency of the Dhaka-Maitri express has been increased. The inaugural run with end-to-end Immigration and Customs services for the Maitri Express and the inaugural commercial run of the Kolkata-Khulna Bandhan service are all expected soon. More bus services linking our cities have begun. There are more immigration check points along our border. These are but a few of the success stories that I can share.

Our people to people contacts and connections are our biggest strength and we need to take all possible steps to facilitate their interaction. I am happy to know that Bangladeshis constitute the largest number of visitors to India - our Mission and Posts in Bangladesh issued 9.76 lakh visas in 2016 and we expect this to grow to about 14 lakh visas in 2017. The steps we have taken to launch more direct train and bus services will greatly ease travel between our nations. We welcome youth, media and academic exchanges. A 100 member strong Bangladeshi youth delegation has been going to India for the past few years.

Friends, India has always stepped in to assist Bangladesh in times of need. Our cooperation dates back to the Great Liberation War of 1971. The cooperation and camaraderie between our forces is a matter of pride. In order to honour your brave Muktiyoddhas, we are offering 5 year multiple entry visa and are working on a scheme for their medical treatment in India. I will shortly be handing over some memorabilia of the war to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh for display in your museums.

In more recent times, we had launched 'Operation Insaniyat' in September to support Government of Bangladesh in its commendable efforts to provide shelter in Cox's Bazaar to lakhs of displaced persons who have fled from Rakhine State of Myanmar. Through this operation, we have supplied essential requirements by way of parboiled rice, dal, salt, sugar, cooking oil, tea, milk powder, mosquito nets and soap to about 300,000 displaced persons. The material has been distributed to the intended recipients through the Bangladeshi district administration in Cox's Bazar.

I may add that India is deeply concerned at the spate of violence in Rakhine State of Myanmar. We have urged that the situation be handled with restraint, keeping in mind the welfare of the population.

It is clear that normalcy will only be restored with the return of the displaced persons to Rakhine state. In our view, the only long term solution to the situation in Rakhine State is rapid socio-economic and infrastructure development that would have a positive impact on all the communities living in the State. India, for its part, has committed to provide financial and technical assistance for identified projects to be undertaken in Rakhine State in conjunction with the local authorities. We have also supported implementation of the recommendations contained in the Kofi Annan led Special Advisory Commission report.

Friends, while I have focused on the progress in our bilateral relationship, we are aware of the outstanding issues. We assure you that we are working to resolve them.

In conclusion, I would like to thank His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh for inviting me here for this meeting.

I thank you all.

October 22, 2017



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Visitors: 137138200 , Page last updated on: 22/10/2017

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