



Delhi needs to address Dhaka's concerns

Foreign adviser says ties between two countries may improve if India does so

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain yesterday said Bangladesh-India relations could have improved if New Delhi had addressed Dhaka's concerns.

"Bangladesh's previous government tried its best to address the concerns of India.... But India did not take measures to address those of Bangladesh," he said.

The adviser was speaking at a roundtable on India-Bangladesh relationship, co-hosted by the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG) and North South University's political science and sociology department, at the university.

Touhid said Bangladesh is not a threat to anyone.

Some major concerns for Bangladesh include the signing of the Teesta water-sharing treaty and ending border killings. Such killings, he noted, only occur during wartime.

"India has to address this issue. If anyone commits a crime, they can be tried in court. Why should they



Touhid Hossain

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be killed?"

The adviser said the dynamics of Indo-Bangla relations shifted after the fall of the Awami League regime on August 5. He hoped India will try to take forward the relations in this new context.

He, however, expressed concern over the Indian media's aggressive campaigns against Bangladesh, especially regarding the attacks on religious minority communities. "This is detrimental to a good relationship."

Touhid stressed that Bangladesh's media should play a role in countering the misinformation spread by Indian media, and in covering the Bangladesh foreign ministry's statements.

He said it is quite obvious powerful countries would exert influence over the weaker ones. Therefore, Bangladesh should boost its capability, especially improving the quality of education and skills, and ending political divisions.

"Bangladeshis working in the Middle East are often paid much less than the nationals from other countries only because of a lack of adequate skills and English communication skills."

He called for national consensus on foreign policy, stating that Bangladesh has often achieved much less in negotiations than it could have due to a lack of national consensus.

Addressing the event, BNP Vice Chairman SM Asaduzzaman Ripon said the AL regime provided facilities to India without proper negotiations, solely to stay in power, thereby

weakening its bargaining position. The previous government also falsely tried to give an impression that militancy would rise in Bangladesh.

He said if anyone is accused of any crime, the person's arrest should not be viewed from a religious perspective. India's concern over the recent arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das constitutes interference in Bangladesh's internal affairs, he added.

Lt Gen (ret'd) Mohammad Mahfuzur Rahman, former principal staff officer of the Armed Forces Division, said India as a regional power feels nervous about China's influence on the South Asian countries.

That is why, he said, it is challenging for Bangladesh and other small countries in the region to maintain relations with the regional powers. "We need to be smart."

Prof Mohammad Abdur Rob, vice chancellor of Manarat International University, said Indo-Bangla relationship should be founded on fairness and equity. He, however, regretted that India has been interfering in Bangladesh's internal affairs.

"India is publicising Bangladesh's mass uprising in a negative light."

Stressing the need for developing Bangladesh's military deterrence, he said strong unity among the political parties would enable Dhaka to navigate diplomatic issues more effectively.

AB Party Joint Member Secretary Asaduzzaman Fuaad, former diplomat Saquib Ali, NSU Vice Chancellor Prof Abdul Hannan Chowdhury, SIPG Director Sk Tawfique M Haque and NSU Associate Professor M Jashim Uddin also spoke at the event.