

China to remain engaged with Bangladesh in its next development: Momen

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The Daily Morning Voice Online Desk: Newly appointed Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang has conveyed to Bangladesh that his country will “remain engaged” in Bangladesh’s development journey to the next level, noting Bangladesh’s “remarkable” economic progress over the years. “Our discussion was very useful and fruitful. Good news is that China has expressed its willingness to remain engaged with Bangladesh in our development journey. They want to work with us as a partner,” Bangladesh’s Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen said today.

Talking to reporters after attending a discussion, marking the historic Homecoming Day of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Momen said he and his Chinese counterpart discussed the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war, including disruptions in the supply chain and economic fallout. “We need to work together to overcome the current situation (due to the Ukraine war),” Momen said.

The foreign minister said he raised the huge trade gap issue with China as Bangladesh imports goods worth US\$ 13 billion against exports worth less than US\$ 800 million. He said though there was a decision of duty-free and quota-free facilities for 98 percent of Bangladeshi products, it has not been fully implemented yet due to the absence of a gazette notification. Businesses are yet to take advantage of the duty-free and quota-free facilities in the Chinese market, the minister said, seeking steps from the Chinese side.

Regarding the Rohingya issue, Momen said the Chinese side sees some problems in Myanmar that are delaying the repatriation of the Rohingyas. “But he (Chinese foreign minister) remains hopeful.” Momen said if the Rohingya issue remains unresolved, there is a possibility that they could become “radicalised”. “These people are stateless. Their future is uncertain. For that reason, they could succumb to extremism and terrorism,” he added. The Bangladeshi foreign Minister sought special measures from the Chinese side so that the problem could be resolved as soon as possible. “At least the process should start. He agreed,” Momen told reporters referring to his conversation with the Chinese foreign minister.

Bangladesh is hosting over 1.1 million Rohingyas in Cox’s Bazar and Bhasan Char and not a single Rohingya has been repatriated since August, 2017. In August 2017, a deadly crackdown by Myanmar army on Rohingya Muslims sent hundreds of thousands fleeing across the border into Bangladesh. Bangladesh also conveyed to China that it maintains a balanced foreign policy with all countries while reassuring Dhaka’s support to Beijing. “We believe in the One-China principle. We maintain a balanced foreign policy. This is our principle. We will extend our support (to China) from time to time,” Momen told reporters at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport early Tuesday as conveyed to his Chinese counterpart who had a brief stopover there. Momen received his Chinese counterpart upon his arrival at around 1:58am, a senior official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told UNB.

The two Foreign Ministers had a brief meeting at the VIP Lounge of the airport and discussed issues of mutual interest. Momen described the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Bangladesh in 2016 as a milestone but mentioned that many decisions in terms of investment are yet to be implemented. The foreign minister of Bangladesh also mentioned China’s involvement in a number of important development projects including the rail link of Padma Bridge. He also thanked the Chinese government for its support to Bangladesh during Covid-19 pandemic. The Chinese foreign minister invited Momen to visit Beijing at a mutually convenient time. In reply, Momen also invited his Chinese counterpart to come again for a longer stay.

Foreign Minister Momen saw off his Chinese counterpart at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 2:50 am on Tuesday. Earlier, Momen told UNB that it was not an official visit to Bangladesh, but the Chinese foreign minister would make a stopover here on his way to another destination. Qin Gang, who until recently was ambassador to the US, has started his term with a weeklong trip to five African countries. To “deepen the China-Africa comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership”, Qin Gang will visit Ethiopia, Gabon, Angola, Benin, Egypt, the African Union Headquarters and the League of Arab States Headquarters upon invitation, from January 9 to 16, 2023, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a daily media briefing on Monday.