

WB has growing dynamic relationship with Bangladesh: Trotsenburg

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The Daily Morning Voice Online Desk: Terming the World Bank-Bangladesh relationship as a “success story”, visiting World Bank managing director Alex van Trotsenburg on Sunday said that the lending agency has growing dynamic relationship with Bangladesh which has a huge potential for further growth. “The World Bank believes passionately for the development of this country and always believed it,” he said while addressing a press conference on his visit to Bangladesh marking the 50 years partnership between the World Bank and Bangladesh at the Bangabandhu International Conference Center (BICC) here.

Asked about the growing challenges before the country, Alex said that as per the latest Global Economic Prospect of the World Bank, the global economic growth has been projected at 1.7 percent, the lowest growth the world has experienced over the last three decades, although the global growth projection was 3 percent in last June. “This indicates that how challenged the global economy is while Bangladesh is also integrated with the world economy,” he added. Asked whether their decision for withdrawing funding from the Padma Multipurpose Bridge Project was wrong or not, Alex said that over the last 50 years, the World Bank Group has committed over \$42 billion to Bangladesh against some 365 projects. “We’ve always said that we’re going to be a long-term partner ...there can be sometimes ups and downs, but the main thing is that the World Bank stay focused on the development,” he said.

Alex cited that before the proposed funding in Padma Bridge, the World Bank used to commit \$1 billion per year to Bangladesh on average, but the last IDA-19 package consists of \$4.5 billion in just two years. Replying to another question about the possibility of lowering the lending rate, he said the standard IDA rates do not change regardless the cost of borrowings in the market is going up. He said although those who are borrowing from market are facing higher cost, “But, we can’t do too much in this regard.” Replying to another question, the World Bank managing director said the budget support is happening more in the developing countries as all the developing countries now need more money.

“We’re here when the lights are off, we need to be here for a long-term partnership and also need to step up in crisis,” he added. Responding to a question on debt relief, Alex said that some 60 countries are in debt distress where Sri Lanka is a prominent case. He informed that they are planning for a comprehensive debt relief for countries like Zambia adding, “We’re looking forward to do as much as we can.” Sought comments on the Rohingya crisis, Alex termed it as a “terrible crisis” and said that the trend is deeply concerning. He noted that the people of Bangladesh and the government have shown incredible solidarity and generosity to the forcibly displaced Rohingyas adding, “Everybody hopes that the Rohingyas would return to their homeland,” Alex, however, said the political situation in Myanmar is making it extremely difficult like “stuck in a rock and hard place.”

In this regard, he mentioned that the World Bank has so far mobilized \$590 million to Bangladesh including grants adding, “We’ll continue to see how we can be supportive to the government to the maximum extent possible.” Citing that the lending agency is in a difficult operating environment over the issue, he said that the crisis calls for the whole world to provide additional support for having a peaceful world. Mentioning that the World Bank has been enjoying a wonderful relationship with Bangladesh, Alex said that they are also looking to enjoy such relationship in the future. “We’re accompanying the country in its next phase of development efforts particularly trying to double the per capita income and also to see how we can support the country to face new challenges,” he added.

Highlighting the World Bank’s support in Bangladesh’s various sectors like human resource development, education, health, disaster management, infrastructure, agriculture, social protection, Alex said Bangladesh is

solidly in a lower mid income range while the country is also poised to double its income level by 2031. “We’ve a clear vision to reduce poverty and invest large sum in human capital particularly in education,” he added. The World Bank managing director also opined that the lending agency could work more in climate change and digitalization related issues with Bangladesh in the coming days. World Bank Vice President Martin Raiser, country director Abdoulaye Seck and senior external affairs officer Mehrin Ahmed Mahbub were present at the press conference.