

Sri Lanka thanks Bangladesh for timely assistance on road to recovery

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Online Desk: Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe has conveyed Sri Lanka's gratitude to the Bangladesh government and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the timely assistance as the country battles to rebuild its economy. Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen is now in Sri Lanka as a guest for the country's low-key 75th Independence Day celebrations, for which the guest list was filled up mostly by neighbouring countries at foreign ministry-level, reports UNB.

Momen, along with the others, attended the "Independence Parade" featuring march-past, fly-by, and parachute display by the joint forces at the Galle Face Green, Colombo Saturday. The foreign minister later paid a courtesy call on President Wickremesinghe at the Presidential Secretariat. It was then that Wickremesinghe conveyed the Sri Lanka people's gratitude to their neighbours in Bangladesh. In a friendly gesture, Bangladesh had extended a \$200 million loan to cash-strapped Sri Lanka under a currency swap arrangement in 2021. Also on Saturday, Momen attended a bilateral meeting at the Sri Lankan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the meeting, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister MUM Ali Sabry and his Bangladeshi counterpart both underscored the need for expeditious implementation of existing sectoral cooperation with a special focus on ongoing preferential trade negotiation, cooperation in business and investment, tourism and enhanced connectivity. Momen called for a reduction in the Dhaka-Colombo airfare to promote people-to-people contact and trade and commerce. He emphasised the need for priority berthing for Bangladesh feeder vessels for enhanced shipping connectivity.

The Bangladesh foreign minister also met his Nepalese counterpart Bimala Rai Paudyal on the sidelines where they discussed matters of mutual interest. Pakistan were represented by State Minister for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar, who called on Momen. He told the state minister that Pakistan should formally apologise for the atrocities perpetrated against unarmed Bangalees in 1971. Shri V Muraleedharan, state minister for foreign affairs of India, also met Momen. They discussed the upcoming bilateral visits and issues of mutual interest and emphasised trade and commerce for the benefit of the people of the two countries.

All the ministers from South Asian countries appreciated the current government under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for the continued economic advancement of Bangladesh. In the evening, Momen attended a reception hosted by the Sri Lankan president in honour of visiting foreign ministers/dignitaries from other South Asian countries – namely, India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Pakistan – and the secretary general of the Commonwealth as well as state minister for foreign affairs of Japan. The foreign minister will return to Dhaka Sunday.