

US wants free, fair election in Bangladesh: Blinken

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Online Desk: The United States has reiterated its desire to see a free and fair election in Bangladesh, noting that the world will be observing Bangladesh's next national election. "Of course, we're looking – the world is looking – to Bangladesh for its next election, to make sure that they set a strong example of free and fair election for the region and for the world," US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken said during his meeting with Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen in Washington on Monday afternoon (US time), reports UNB.

Appreciating Bangladesh's engagement with the USA, Blinken said they are committed to working together to find ways to further "strengthen and deepen" the robust relationship, and to address economic development and human rights as well. He said the US deeply appreciates Bangladesh's remarkable generosity in hosting over 1.1 million Rohingyas in the country and assured to continue work towards repatriation of the Rohingyas.

While briefing the media after the meeting, Momen said Bangladesh, like the US, also wants a free, fair and ideal election. "Democracy is in our blood. People gave blood to uphold democracy, justice and human dignity," he said, seeking help from the US for a free and fair election. Momen highlighted the independent Election Commission and measures taken for holding the election transparently.

The foreign minister agreed with his US counterpart on the importance of a free and fair elections and reaffirmed the commitment of Bangladesh government in this regard. He said Bangladesh welcomes US observers but not any "partisan observers". "All opposition parties must come forward to help in holding a free and fair election. We are creating an environment for a free fair election."

Momen said he handed over a letter from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina – addressed to US President Joe Biden – to Secretary Blinken. "We are proud of the partnership," he said, adding that he is in Washington to strengthen and solidify the relationship. Momen said Bangladesh wants to improve its ties with the United States towards a stronger trade relationship in the next 50 years. "Bangladesh has a multifaceted, dynamic and wide ranging relationship with the US. Over the last 50 years we have done very well. We look forward to the next 50 years," he said. "We achieved all with your support and active partnership and we are proud of your partnership and we look beyond, so that we can have better days in future. I am here to strengthen and solidify our relationship," Momen added.

Bangladesh raised the issue of Rashed Chowdhury, a convicted killer of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who lives freely in the United States. Momen hoped that the US will not be a shelter for killers and will hand over Rashed to Bangladesh as it wants to establish the rule of law in the country.

Blinken said the relationship between Bangladesh and the United States has grown tremendously over the last 50 years, particularly in the economic aspect. He also mentioned people-to-people ties and said the two countries have been doing more together recently – from climate change to health.

Foreign Minister Momen called upon the United States to take advantage of the generous investment regime of Bangladesh and encourage the US private sector to invest in special economic zones and hi-tech parks in Bangladesh. Momen thanked the US government for their generous support in combating COVID-19 pandemic and continued humanitarian support for the Rohingyas sheltered in Bangladesh. He stressed the need for sustained international pressure on Myanmar for creating environment for voluntary repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar.

Bangladesh and the United States have expressed their eagerness to further bolster bilateral ties for the next 50 years, building on the solid foundation of the past 50 years. Terming Bangladesh-US relationship wide-ranging, dynamic and multifaceted, Momen hoped to develop, strengthen and solidify the ties. He thanked President Joe Biden for his warm message to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the occasion of the Independence Day of Bangladesh, which the US President ended with “Joy Bangla”. During the meeting, the two leaders discussed various bilateral and other issues of mutual interest, including strengthening and diversifying economic partnership, addressing Rohingya crisis and climate change, labour rights, civil liberty, and elections.

Apprising the US secretary of state of the ongoing and completed works in labour sector reforms in Bangladesh, the foreign minister hoped that these efforts would be duly acknowledged and appreciated through stronger economic partnership between the two countries. Blinken lauded the ongoing US-Bangladesh consultative process in improving labour situation in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Ambassador to the USA Muhammad Imran, Deputy Head of Mission Ferdousi Shahriar, Director General (North America) Khandker Masudul Alam, and officials of the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were present at the meeting. Counselor Derek Chollet, Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration Ms. Julieta Valls Noyes, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Ms. Kara McDonald, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Afreen Akhter accompanied Secretary Blinken in the meeting.