

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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Press Release

Foreign Secretary meets Senior Officials at the State Department

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Washington DC, 18 February 2014: Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque met with senior US State Department officials today including Nisha Desai Biswal, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of South & Central Asian Affairs. At the meeting with Nisha Biswal, which was followed by a luncheon, Foreign Secretary was accompanied by Bangladesh Ambassador to United States Akramul Qader, Muhammad Abdul Muhith, Deputy Chief of Mission and Md. Mahfuzur Rahman, Director General (Americas), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dhaka. Atul Keshap, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South & Central Asian Affairs) accompanied Ms. Biswal at the meeting. In addition, the Foreign Secretary had meetings with Senior Advisor for Myanmar Judith Cefkin and a number of officials of the Department of Labour, USTR and State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour.

During the meeting, Nisha Biswal and Shahidul Haque exchanged views about a wide range of issues involving the priorities of the present government in Bangladesh, labour rights and other pertinent issues and role of Bangladesh in regional integration and goodwill efforts among countries of South and East Asia. Referring to the Hearing at the Senate held on 11 February, Nisha Biswal said that she wanted to portray US-Bangladesh relations to the Senate Committee in a balanced manner within a broader context. She told, though the 5 January election in Bangladesh has a low turnout, the US would continue to remain engaged with the Government of Bangladesh working towards a stable, prosperous and a democratic country.

Foreign Secretary briefed the US officials about priorities of the present government which are, law and order, economic advancement and growth in business, democracy and good governance and regional integration, security and stability. He said that the present leadership in Bangladesh believes in consensus-based political process and was always forthcoming in providing necessary space to the political parties as well as to the civil society. Responding to Foreign Secretary, the US Assistant Secretary asserted that violence has no space in a democratic political process. Foreign Secretary reiterated its commitment to protect lives and properties of

people of Bangladesh. He also shared various programmes that have been undertaken to protect labour rights and to ensure workplace safety in the RMG sector.

The two sides discussed extensively on regional integration and various regional and sub-regional arrangements including Indo-Pacific Corridor (new silk route), SAARC, BCIM and other triangular initiatives in the areas of hydropower, energy and connectivity. Nisha Biswal emphasized that South Asia, as a region is a conduit between East and West Asia and United States expects that Bangladesh would continue its leading role in promoting regional cooperation.

In a separate meeting, the US Senior Advisor for Myanmar Judith Cefkin briefed the Foreign Secretary about her recent visit to Rakhaine State of Myanmar and said that the US would continue pursuing the Government of Myanmar to address the citizenship issue of Muslims population to resolve the refugee and displacement issues which were originated in Myanmar. The Foreign Secretary reiterated that the issue of displacement across the border of Myanmar Muslims has its origin in Myanmar and therefore, the solution of the issue should be designed in Myanmar.

The Foreign Secretary had a joint meeting with the officials of the USTR, Department of Labour and the Bureau of International Labour Affairs and briefed them on the progress concerning the rights of the workers and workplace safety in the RMG sector in Bangladesh and also exchanged views on the potential of strengthening of trade and investment relations between the two countries. The US side appreciated the actions undertaken by the government in addressing workers' rights issue and hoping that the process would continue with same vigour.

The US side confirmed the dates for the First Council Meeting of TICFA in Dhaka on 7-8 April, the 3rd Bangladesh-US Security Dialogue in Dhaka on 16 April and the 3rd US-Bangladesh Partnership Dialogue in Washington DC in mid June. The Foreign Secretary welcomed Deputy Assistant Secretary Atul Keshap for his visit to Dhaka in late February.