



PROCEEDINGS



## Country Lecture on

# EXPLORING KOREA-BANGLADESH RELATIONS IN THE LAST FIVE DECADES AND BEYOND

Thursday, 28 October 2021



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS)





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# Country Lecture on

## Exploring Korea-Bangladesh Relations in the Last Five Decades and Beyond

Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organized a Country Lecture on “Exploring Korea-Bangladesh Relations in the Last Five Decades and Beyond” on 28 October 2021. H.E. Mr. LEE Jang-Keun, Ambassador of South Korea to Bangladesh was the guest speaker. Ambassador M Fazlul Karim, Chairman, BIISS chaired the Lecture, while Major General Md. Emdad Ul Bari, ndc, psc, te, Director General, BIISS delivered the welcome address.

An Insightful and comprehensive presentation on Korea-Bangladesh relations by Ambassador LEE Jang-Keun was followed by a lively open discussion. Senior officials from the Bangladesh government, former ambassadors, representatives from different foreign missions, businessmen, members of academia, researchers, faculties from various universities and media representatives took part in the Lecture and expressed their views on various aspects of Korea-Bangladesh relations during the open forum.



# Welcome Address



**Major General Md Emdad Ul Bari, ndc, psc, te**

*Director General, BISS*

**Major General Md Emdad Ul Bari, ndc, psc, te**, Director General, BISS welcomed everyone and expressed heartfelt gratitude towards H.E. Mr. LEE Jang-Keun, Ambassador of South Korea to Bangladesh for gracing the session as the guest speaker in BISS's one of the flagship events, "Country Lecture Series (CLS)". General Bari also paid his deepest tribute to the memory of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and to all martyrs who laid their lives for the nation.

The Director General of BISS highlighted that the CLS program of BISS was introduced with an idea to have an informed and scholarly discussion on Bangladesh's bilateral relations with different countries with whom the country has profound diplomatic relations and invited ambassadors and high commissioners to deliver talks regarding their take on our bilateral relations, important issues between the two nations and future areas for cooperation.

The Director General mentioned that the Republic of Korea (ROK) is a true companion to Bangladesh's journey towards economic development, industrialization, freedom from poverty and women empowerment. He reminded that in the ready-made garments (RMG) industry, Bangladesh is one of the world's largest garment exporters accounting for 84 percent of Bangladesh's exports. The very foundation of this industry commenced in the early 1980s when some Bangladeshis received free training from Korean Daewoo Company, and pioneered this industry in Bangladesh. He added that South Korean Firm, Youngones Corporation formed the first equity joint-venture garment factory with a Bangladeshi firm in 1980. He expressed that the Bangladesh-Korea cooperation revolutionized the industrial sector of Bangladesh, which also played a significant role to drive a massive societal change by economically uplifting a large cohort of poor and vulnerable women. Almost 80 percent of garment workers are women in the RMG sector, the opportunity provided women empowerment against early marriage and the ability to make decisions at home, and a voice in the social sphere. He also mentioned that South Korea as of today is the largest FDI investor in the RMG sector, continues to play a pivotal role in the development of the country's RMG sector.

Drawing attention towards global business, trade and commerce, the Director General expressed that Asia emerged as the global hub for manufacturing and economic growth engine and is set to reclaim its deserved





position on the civilizational map. In that continuation, he congratulated the entire nation for having global attention due to the remarkable economic and social progress the country has made in celebrating 50 years of independence. He also mentioned that even with severe setbacks caused by global COVID-19 pandemic, the South Asian nation is on track to becoming a middle-income country within the next few years and marching strongly towards becoming a developed nation by 2041. He added that the time has come for Bangladesh to become a hub in the global production network with diversity in its export basket from RMG to sectors like IT, shipbuilding, electronics manufacturing, pharmaceuticals etc. He hoped that being the third-largest FDI investor in Bangladesh, Korea will break into newer avenues of manufacturing as Bangladesh-Korea cooperation in Infrastructural development through private-public partnership (PPP) and technology transfer will provide industrial diversification for Bangladesh.

The Director General brought up the visionary foreign policy enshrined in our constitution by the Father of The Nation, which envisions a world where relations between states will be based on principles of respect for national sovereignty and equality, non-interference, peaceful settlement of international disputes, and respect for international law and the principles enunciated in the United Nations Charter. He highlighted that the Bangabandhu's famous dictum, "friendship to all and malice towards none" worked as the moral compass during the Cold War. He added that Bangladesh has been handling the Rohingya refugee influx with great maturity, immense tolerance and humanity in seeking a peaceful resolution of the crisis as a responsible member of the international community. He hoped that as an influential actor in Asian economic development, Korea will use its economic leverage in Myanmar to help resolve the Rohingya crisis as Bangladesh hopes for a peaceful Korean Peninsula as our Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reiterated her commitment during the 2019 official visit.

The Director General further mentioned drawing attention to the event, where South Korean Youngone Corporation restored Baro Sardar Bariin 800 years old city Panam Nagar as a shining example of two friendly nations' cooperation in preserving a cultural heritage site in Bangladesh. He also expressed that Bangladesh and Korea can improve their cultural exchange and people-to-people contact as the rise of the Korean film industry, Korean culture and K-pop is earning a soft corner amongst our teens and youth.

Finally, at the end of his address, Major General Md Emdad Ul Bari expressed his gratitude to the honorable guest speaker H E Mr LEE Jang Keun and the learned audience for encouraging us with their participation and also expected to have an intriguing discussion followed by an engaging interactive session.

# Address by the Chair



**Ambassador M Fazlul Karim**

*Chairman, BISS*

**Ambassador M Fazlul Karim**, Chairman, BISS, welcomed all at the Lecture. He paid tribute and homage to the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, under whose able leadership and guidance, the country fought its glorious war of liberation.

Reflecting on the Bangladesh-Korea relationship, Ambassador Karim at the very outset stated that South Korea has been a vital development partner of Bangladesh for long and its presence is very much visible in a number of fields. They were the pioneers of garments industries in independent Bangladesh when the Youngone Corporation established their business around four decades ago. Relations and cooperation have expanded in other sectors as well, especially in technology, human resource development, economic and industrial. The two countries are working at present with a view to diversifying their mutual relations through various undertakings in other potential areas besides the existing ones.

Bangladesh and the Republic of Korea (ROK) enjoy friendly relations since the establishment of formal diplomatic relationship on 18 December 1973. ROK recognized the newly independent Bangladesh on 12 May 1972 and established its diplomatic mission here on 01 March 1975 while Bangladesh opened its resident diplomatic mission in Seoul on 16 February 1987. Both countries have commonality in their history of struggle for independence as they achieved their independence from occupation forces. They also struggled and made sacrifices to preserve the dignity of their respective mother languages.

High-level visits by leaders from both nations have been crucial in development of bilateral relations. Former Prime Minister of Korea, Lee Young-duk, visited Bangladesh from 2-4 September 1994, followed by the visit of former Prime Minister Kim Suk-soo from 8-10 November 2002. Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, visited Korea from 16-18 May 2010. Former Prime Minister of Korea, H.E. Lee Nak-yeon visited Bangladesh from 13-15 July 2019. It has created a momentum in the bilateral relationship. Aside from political visits, people to people contacts continue to grow through more number of Koreans and Bangladeshis visiting each other's country, alongside visits by private sector delegations.



He stated that, the ROK has been a reliable, longtime development partner of Bangladesh, who has been extending significant cooperation and support since the early 1970s. It is one of the major trading partners of Bangladesh. There is a steady rise in bilateral trade between the two countries. The ROK was the first country to set up an exclusive foreign Export Processing Zone (KEPZ) in Bangladesh and is still one of the top sources of Foreign Direct Investment, especially in textile and garment sector. It is increasingly engaging itself in infrastructure, energy, ICT and Medical equipment sectors. Over 200 Korean companies have so far invested in Bangladesh. H. E. Nak-yon, during his visit in July 2019, expressed interest to make cluster investment in SEZs. In terms of ODA, Bangladesh is Korea's priority partner country and the second largest recipient of ODA with a total volume of US\$ 790 million between 1987 and 2019.

Then he emphasized on Cultural cooperation aspects. For him, cultural cooperation is another vital aspect of Korea-Bangladesh relations. Bangladesh and ROK renewed the Cultural Exchange Programme for the period of 2019-2023 during the visit of Premier H.E. Lee Nak-yon in July 2019. The Bangladesh Embassy in Seoul maintains strong ties with Korean cultural organizations through active participation in their major events like Seoul Friendship Fair, Itaewon Global Village Festival, Seoul International Women's Association (SIWA) Bazaar, Global Gathering Korea, Rose Festivals, etc. Currently, there are about 20,000 Bangladeshi people living in Korea, most of whom are expatriate workers and their families. Remittance from those workers is over US\$ 01 billion, making Korea the 12th largest source of remittances.

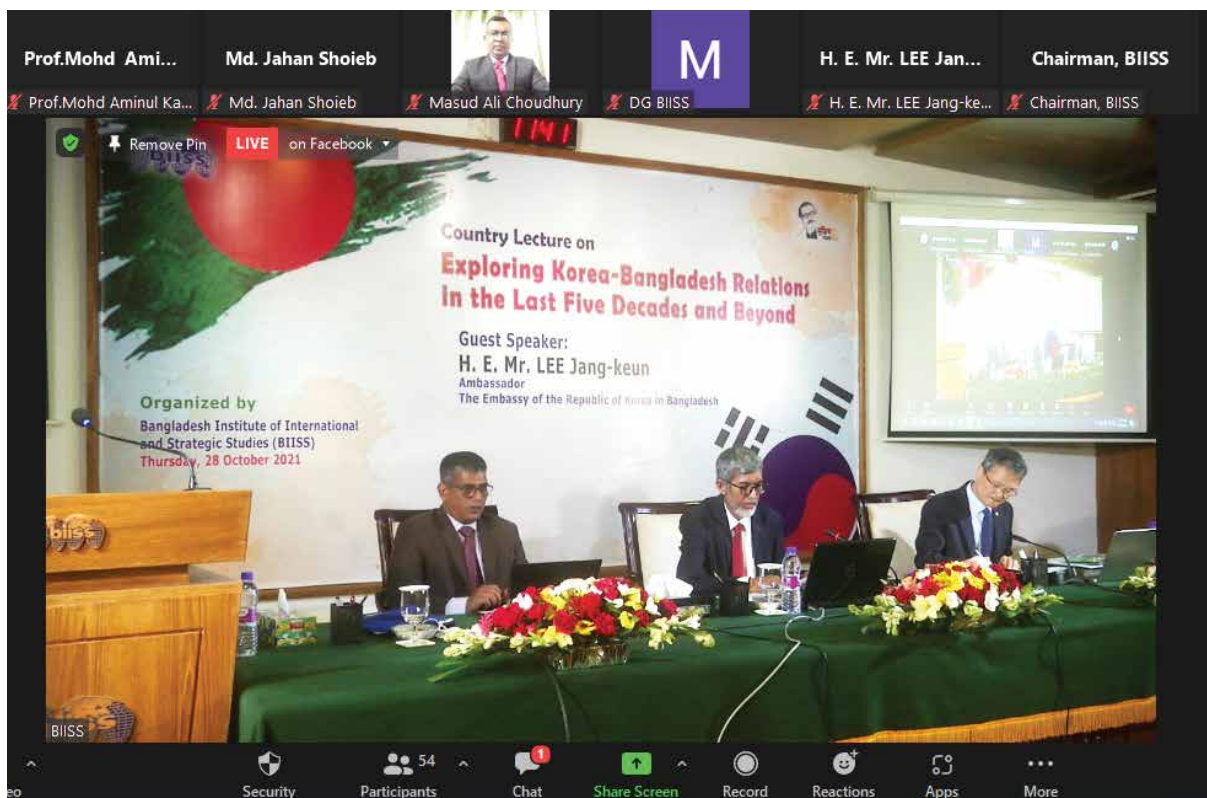
Human resource development has been one of the key areas of Korea's support to Bangladesh. In particular, through the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA)'s assistance projects, the country has provided a number of human resource development projects in Bangladesh, most notably the three vocational training centres in Dhaka, Chattogram and Rajshahi which will help it meeting the growing demand for skilled workforce both at home and abroad. ICT is another area where Korea has been making strenuous efforts in recent years with focus on human resource development. In addition to the Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) assistance of establishing and operating ICT education and training centre in Dhaka since 2012, KOICA has set up 100 IT labs in secondary schools in Dhaka to help strengthen ICT capacity for computer teachers, endowing students with basic computer literacy and ICT education.

Regarding the Korean Government Scholarship Programme (KGSP), Ambassador M Fazlul Karim said that it remains an important instrument of the ROK's extension of cooperation with Bangladesh. Highly esteemed and competitive, these generous scholarships provide Bangladeshi applicants with excellent opportunities of higher education at eminent Korean institutes for undergraduate, masters and PhD levels alike. Also, in collaboration with Dhaka University, Korea launched a project in 2021 to establish an education and training center with a view to promoting creative youth entrepreneurship in Bangladesh. A startup cooperation program has been launched with the ICT Division of Bangladesh government recently, to cultivate entrepreneurship and foster innovative startups among Bangladeshi youth. According to an MOU signed in November 2019 among the ICT Division (Bangladesh), Korea Productivity Center, and Korea Invention Promotion Association, 10 young Bangladeshi startups with innovative ideas were selected in competition and were invited to Korea in March 2021. They will work with Korean experts and mentors for commercialization of their ideas.

Korea's collective investment in Bangladesh amounts to about US\$ 1.2 billion and it ranks 5th among other investors. Around 80 percent of Korean investment is in the manufacturing sector, most of which belongs to RMG. Korean companies are nowadays taking more interest in tapping Bangladesh's fast-growing domestic market. Gradually, they are entering promising areas including electronics, automobiles, and ICT Industry giants like Samsung Electronics and Hyundai Motors have recently partnered with local companies to set up assembly plants for mobile phones, home appliances, and automobiles. Hyundai and KIA automobiles are quite common on Bangladeshi streets. In addition, world-class Korean engineering and construction companies are increasingly taking up large-scale infrastructure projects in Bangladesh such as power plants, airport terminals,

and hospitals. At present, Korea Electric Power Corporation is building a power plant in Chattogram. Samsung cellphones are hugely popular among Bangladeshi customers. Another well-liked Korean electronics brand is LG whose products, like those of Samsung, include various household appliances. Moreover, Samsung Electronics is operating the Samsung R&D Institute Bangladesh (SRBD), a research and development institute, in Dhaka since 2010. It is the first R&D hub of a multinational company in this country employing around 500 Bangladeshi software developers and experts. They are developing different kinds of mobile applications and platforms, thus contributing to the company's worldwide ICT business. Bangladesh's first private hi-tech park is going to be established in the aforementioned KEPZ.

Ambassador M Fazlul Karim noted that during the past five decades the two countries have developed and enjoyed strong ties and partnership in every aspect and every field of cooperation. It is gratifying to note that both nations have been redoubling efforts to further diversify bilateral cooperation. People-to-people contacts are one of them. As Bangladesh celebrates the Mujib Shotohorsho, i.e., birth centennial of the country's founding father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, we are sincerely thankful to the Korean people and government for establishing the Bangabandhu Corner at the Yonsei University Library. It could be an invaluable source, the young generation of South Korea to enrich their knowledge about the history, heritage, and culture of Bangladesh including Bangabandhu's life, his untiring struggles, noble sacrifices, and matchless contributions in founding an independent Bangladesh.



# Lecture



**H E Lee Jang-keun**

*Ambassador, The Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Bangladesh*

**H E Lee Jang-keun**, Ambassador, The Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Bangladesh, thanked BISS for arranging the Lecture on “Exploring Korea-Bangladesh Relations in the Last Five Decades and Beyond” and inviting him as the guest speaker. He highly appreciated the hospitality of the people of Bangladesh, which he has experienced in the last one and half years in Bangladesh. Sharing his personal feelings, he mentioned that the year 2021 is very special for him since it is his 30th anniversary in the South Korean foreign ministry. He joined the Foreign Service in 1991, the year South Korea joined the United Nations. The year 2021 is also extraordinary for Bangladesh as it celebrates the golden jubilee of its independence. This year also marks the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Korea’s recognition of Bangladesh.

Ambassador Lee talked about the diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and South Korea. He informed the audience that South Korea recognized the newly independent Bangladesh on 12 May 1972. He shared with the audience a picture of the official letter by Korean Foreign Minister Yong Shik Kim, dated 12 May 1972, declaring Korea’s recognition of Bangladesh. The consular relation was established in September 1973, which was followed by the establishment of full diplomatic relations on 18 December 1973. The Korean government opened its embassy in Dhaka on 01 March 1975, with the latter nation opening its embassy 12 years later, on 16 February 1987. In establishing the bilateral diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Korea, Ban Ki-moon, who was later elected as the Secretary General of the UN, played a key role in the 1970s. Ambassador Lee shared a photograph of the official notification letter of the Republic of Korea’s de jure recognition of Bangladesh, which was drafted by Ban Ki-moon on 11 May 1972.

Ambassador Lee then highlighted Rabindranath Tagore’s role in establishing a cultural connection between Korea and the Indian subcontinent in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. On 28 March 1929, Tagore wrote the poem “Lamp of the East”, which made a huge impact in the minds of Koreans. Quoting from the poem, Ambassador Lee noted that Rabindranath Tagore portrayed Korea as one of the lamp bearers in the golden age of Asia. He also talked about the day of the national tragedy of Bangladesh when the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed in 1975. Sharing a picture of Bangabandhu with Korean



delegates, Ambassador Lee told the audience that the delegation met with Bangabandhu to discuss the bilateral relations only the day before he was assassinated.

At this stage of his speech, Ambassador Lee discussed in detail the cooperation between Korea and Bangladesh in the Ready-made garments (RMG) sector. He highlighted the journey of Desh Garment and its contribution to developing the country's RMG sector. Referring to a World Bank Discussion Paper, Ambassador Lee mentioned that, in July 1978, Mr Noorul Quader started Desh Garments and made an agreement with the Korean company Daewoo for machinery purchases, training and marketing. Accordingly, in 1979, 130 managers, supervisors and workers were sent to Daewoo's main garment factory in Pusan, Korea, for six months. The trainees head for home in November 1979, followed by 3 Korean engineers and production technicians. Nine more Korean engineers and production technicians came to Bangladesh for a year in March 1980. Desh Garments started its production, exclusively for export, with 450 machines (from Daewoo) and 500 workers in April 1980. In the year 1979/80, Desh garment exported its first products (43,000 shirts at an export worth of about US\$ 56,000). Referring to the World Bank report, Ambassador Lee argued that Bangladeshis who went to Korea for training spawned hundreds of exporting firms.

While talking about the garment sector's contribution to Bangladesh's total export, Ambassador Lee informed the audience that the share of garments export in the country's total export in 1981 was only 0.5 per cent. Between 1982-1984, the sector experienced steady growth, and the share of garments export rose to 3.9 per cent. Since then, the contribution of the garments sector soared drastically, which was 28.2 per cent of the country's total export in 1987. Ambassador Lee believes Korea played an important role in the initial development of Bangladesh's RMG sector.

Ambassador Lee then shed light on the importance of KEPZ (Korea export processing zone) in the bilateral cooperation between Korea and Bangladesh and noted that KEPZ is a symbol of the Korea-Bangladesh tie. The KEPZ was inaugurated in October 1999, which received its environment clearance certificate ten years later in November 2009. Out of its allotted area of 2,492 acres, 2,300 acres have been developed, among

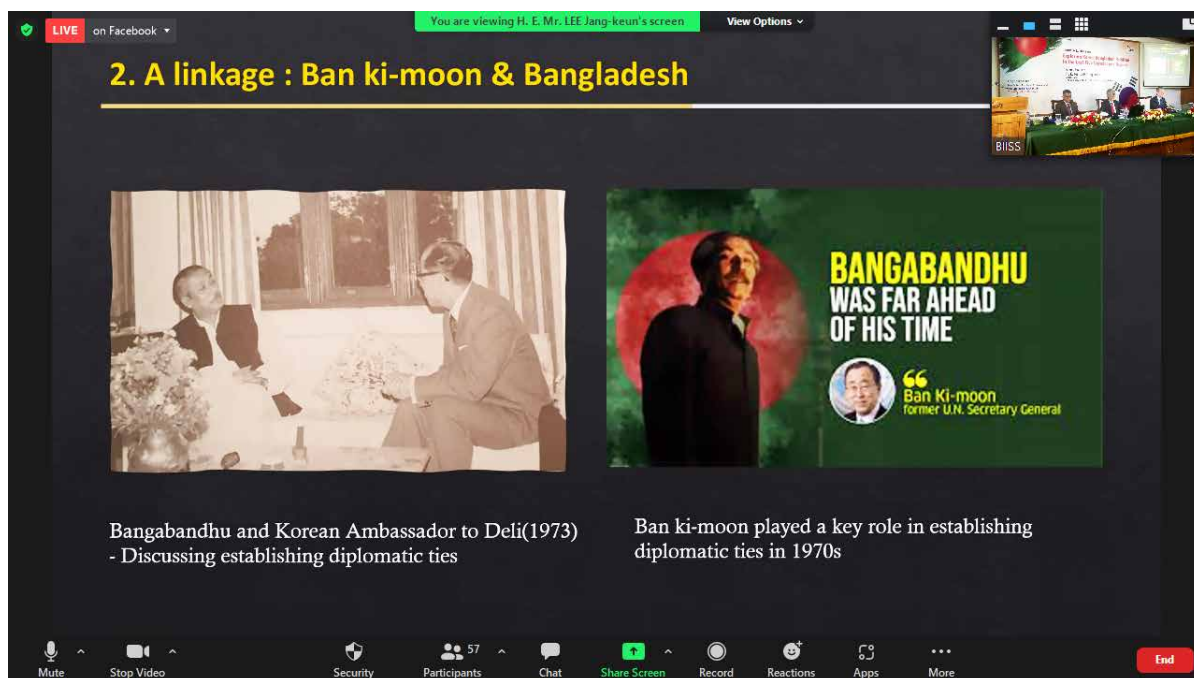
which 836 acres are allocated for factories, 1,296 acres are developed as green area and 360 acres for infrastructure and facilities. Under the KEPZ, 67 factories have been completed or under construction. It has three design and development centres. Around 2.5 million trees have been planted in the area, and 25 water bodies have been developed to conserve water, control floods and sediment flow in the neighbouring settlements. The KEPZ also has a rooftop solar energy generation project through which 40-megawatt power would be generated. A Hi-tech Park was inaugurated in February 2021, with the aim to provide world-class facilities for software development.

Moving towards the economic dimension of the relations between the two countries, Ambassador Lee then shared country-wise stock in Bangladesh as of March 2021 where South Korea has been one of the top five contributors. Countries like China, Hong Kong and Japan are behind South Korea. South Korea also has 72 companies in Bangladesh's Export Processing Zones (EPZs), the second largest number after Bangladesh's own companies. He highlighted some potential sectors like gas and petroleum, banking as well as leather and leather products.

Ambassador Lee then focussed on the trade relations between Bangladesh and South Korea. In terms of trade, South Korea is the 11th largest importer of Bangladeshi goods. But in terms of export receipts of Bangladesh, it is not on the top 10 list. The country is extending duty and quota free access to 95 per cent of Bangladesh products in the Korean market. He then provided a comparative figure of similar trade relations with other countries, i.e., China. He noted that Bangladesh's export to China has been increasing over the years, especially since FY 2015-16. But later, it fell down and trade volume in terms of Bangladesh's export to China is now decreasing. Bangladesh's export to Korea is much lower compared to its export to China—almost half of China's trade volume; but slowly it has been increasing. Within 10 years, between FY 2010-11 and FY 2020-21, the trade volume went up from US\$163.7 million to almost US\$400 million. Bangladesh's import from China has significantly increased over the last 10 years—becoming almost triple. On the other hand, during the same period of time, there is no increase in Bangladesh's import from South Korea; even there are some points where the volume decreased. Ten years ago, in FY 2010-11, the

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## 2. A linkage : Ban ki-moon & Bangladesh



**Bangabandhu and Korean Ambassador to Deli(1973)**  
- Discussing establishing diplomatic ties

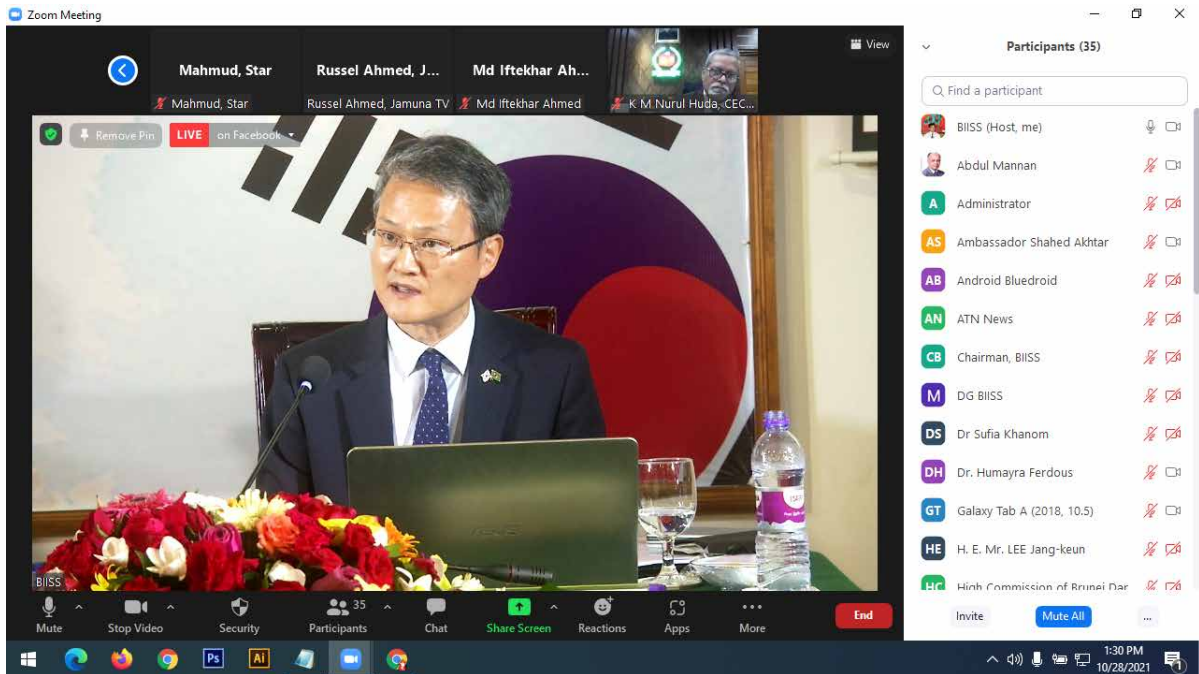
**Ban ki-moon played a key role in establishing diplomatic ties in 1970s**

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proportion of Bangladesh's export to China was 1.4 per cent. In FY 2015-16, it increased to 2.4 per cent; now it is around 2 per cent. However, the proportion of Bangladesh's export to South Korea, 10 years ago, was 0.7 per cent. After ten years, in FY 2020-21, it is only 1 per cent. Regarding Bangladesh's import from China and Korea, in FY 2010-11, the proportion of Bangladesh's import from China was 17.6 per cent. In FY 2015-16, it was 24.1 per cent and in FY 2020-21, it was 23.7 per cent. But the proportion of imports from South Korea to Bangladesh, 10 years ago, was 3.3 per cent. But now, it has decreased to 2.1 per cent. Ambassador Jang-keun emphasized that there needs to be a discussion on why the trade volume decreased and how it can increase again.

At this point, Ambassador Lee made a comparison of South Korea's trade situation in Bangladesh vis-à-vis the surrounding countries. South Korea's export to Bangladesh is around US\$1.2 billion. Korea's export to India is 10 times bigger, around US\$15 billion. Ambassador Lee then highlighted Korea's export to Vietnam, a country which has a smaller economy than Bangladesh, and even a much smaller one than India. But Korea's export to Vietnam is around US\$48.2 billion, almost three times bigger than the export to India. Looking at Vietnam's example, he opined that there is definitely potential for Bangladesh. In terms of the remittance flow of the migrant workers, South Korea might not be in the top ten destination countries for Bangladeshi expatriate workers, but the number is much higher than any European country. In FY 2019-20, South Korea held the 12th position and in FY 2020-21, it was the 13th. However, the amount of remittance has increased from US\$177.84 million to US\$209.16 million.



Ambassador Lee also focussed on the issue of infrastructure. He shared the story of the Jamuna Multipurpose bridge that he learnt from senior Bangladeshi officials upon his arrival. It was built by a South Korean company named Hyundai Constructions. The bridge is the longest bridge in Asia and the 11th longest in the world. He referred to the project as “Yesterday, just a dream; today, a glorious reality” and afterwards lauded the Padma bridge project. He added that, right now, around 100 South Korean companies are involved in different infrastructure projects in Bangladesh. He informed the audience that in 1971, a Korean company was building a highway between Dhaka and Chattogram. It was very important for the South Korean company to continue the business after the independence as well. Now they are working on many other international




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Prof.Mohd Ami... H. E. Mr. LEE Jan... Dr Sufia Khanom


Prof.Mohd Aminul... H. E. Mr. LEE Jang-keun Dr Sufia Khanom Rafid Abrar Sheuli Fateha

LIVE on Facebook


## 7. INFRASTRUCTURE



- Meghnaghat MPP(1999) /Hyundai Construction
- Ashuganji MPP(2011)/ Hyundai ENG
- Patuakhali Transmission Line (2017)/GS Construction



- Jamuna Transmission Line (1979)/ Daerim Construction
- Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge(1994)/Hyundai E&C
- Jamuna Railway(1997) /Samwhan Construction



- Matabari Coal PP(2017) Hyundai/POSCO Construction
- Meghnaghat MPP(2019) Samsung C&T
- Dhaka International Airport (2019) Samsung C&T

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projects, especially on the Dhaka international airport's third terminal which is funded by the Japanese government but constructed by Samsung, a South Korean company. Ambassador Jang-keun believed that these will bring more success stories in the future.


He then shed light on several other mutual projects. Samsung Electronics has made partnership with Fair Electronics and Transcom and they are together making TV, washing machine, refrigerator and smart-phones. Only a few Samsung factories in the world can produce its higher level of products and Bangladesh is one of them. According to the speaker, the reason behind it is that Samsung is very satisfied with the quality of the products made in Bangladesh. Samsung has also established its Research and Development (R&D)

Prof.Mohd Ami... H. E. Mr. LEE Jan... Dr Sufia Khanom


Prof.Mohd Aminul... H. E. Mr. LEE Jang-keun Dr Sufia Khanom Rafid Abrar Sheuli Fateha

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## 9. ODA: ROHINGYA ASSISTANCE



Between 2017–2020 Korea has provided around 20 million USD for Rohingya refugee-related activities in Bangladesh through international agencies.



In 2021, 4 million USD has been allocated to the UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, IOM and IFRC.

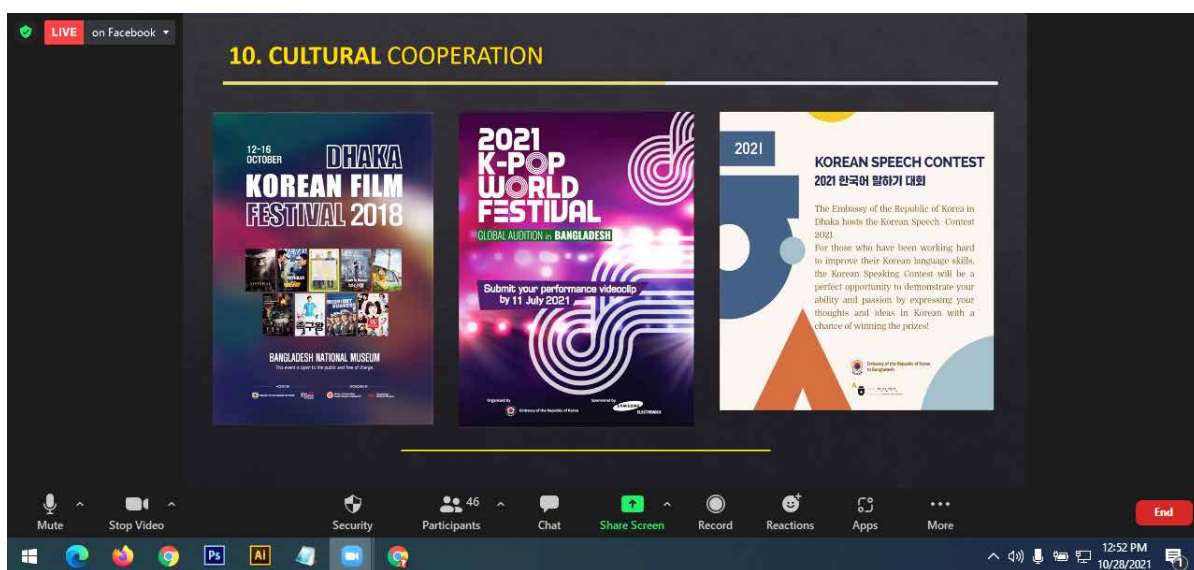
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institute in Bangladesh in 2010 and it currently has around 500 Bangladeshi employees. The company has only 30 R&D centres around the world, and therefore, it shows how positively they are assessing Bangladesh. Hyundai Motors, another South Korean company, is also manufacturing automobiles in Bangladesh. It is not only about assembling and manufacturing the parts but also about knowledge sharing. When Samsung first established its business in Bangladesh, it also had to provide training to the employees and such initiatives are expected for the automobile sector very soon. Hyundai Motors will start production from February 2022 onwards. All these developments show that beyond the RMG sector, collaboration regarding infrastructure development between Bangladesh and South Korea is also going on. Starting from 2016-17, within four or five years, Samsung has been involved significantly in the business arena of Bangladesh.

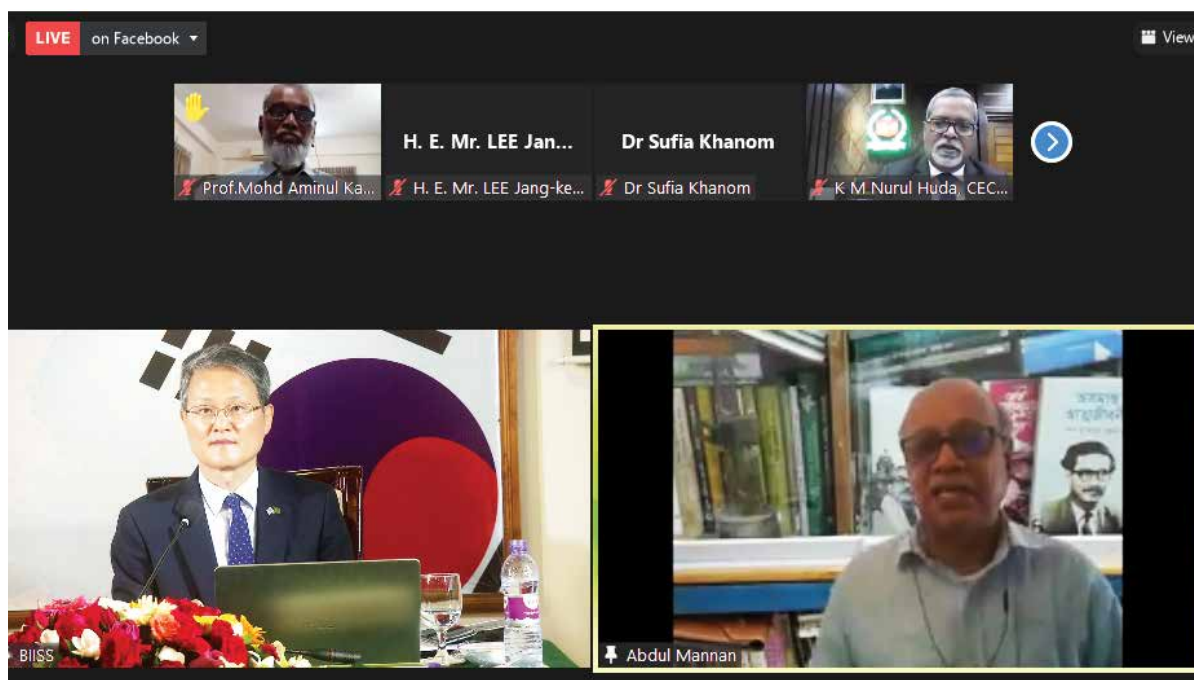
Ambassador Lee mentioned that Bangladesh is the second largest recipient of South Korea's ODA. South Korea's soft loan is a very good option with 0.04 per cent of interest rate, 40 years of payment period and 15 years of grace period. With these loans, different sectors have also benefited. The speaker shared examples of Bangladesh-Korea Friendship Hospital (BKFH) in Savar, established in 1998; National Institute of Advanced Nursing Education & Research in Mugda, Dhaka, established in 2018; and the BSMMU Super-Specialized Hospital in Dhaka, to be established in 2022. Acknowledging that the health sector has been a priority area, Ambassador Lee illustrated the impact of ODA in the Education and Training and the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sectors of Bangladesh.

Regarding the Rohingya refugee crisis, Ambassador Lee noted that between 2017-2020, Korea has provided around US\$20 million for Rohingya refugee-related activities in Bangladesh through international agencies. In 2021, US\$4 million has been allocated for this purpose. He added that South Korea was one of the few countries in the world that were vocal against the atrocities caused by the military government in Myanmar and also imposed sanction on the regime. The sanction still continues. Ambassador Lee then talked about cultural cooperations between Bangladesh and South Korea. He pointed out that there is a Korea Corner at the Dhaka University central library and at the National Museum of Bangladesh. These libraries have books about South Korea and its role in other countries. Only four countries have their centres in the National Museum of Bangladesh—South Korea, China, Iran and Switzerland. The speaker concluded his speech by sharing that from 21 November 2021, the Korea Centre in the Museum will organize the Phylum New Year Festival which will demonstrate different contents related to Korean culture.



# Open Discussion

**Abdul Mannan**, Former Chairman, University Grants Commission (UGC), Bangladesh, started by mentioning the history of RMG industry inception in Bangladesh in the hand of Nurul Kader, an ex-CSP officer with the funding and technological assistance from Daewoo company of South Korea. The 'Desh Garments' was the first export oriented RMG factory in Bangladesh and the first consignment was sent to France with products worth only 1222 \$US Dollar. But Bangladesh has come a long way in this sector and now one of the largest RMG producers in the world and exports garments around the world worth billions. Professor Mannan shed some light on Samsung's, a Korean ace company which provided significant assistance to develop online learning during COVID-19 pandemic under the 'Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project' funded by World Bank and Bangladesh government where Korea was a major partner who helped the education institutes to establish online connectivity amongst them. The funding was provided by BTCL to set up thirty five thousand km of fiber optic to connect all the educational institutions in the country. He praised Korea for being a dependable friend in Bangladesh's long journey towards economic development since 1971. Professor Mannan concluded his remarks by asking H.E Lee to take necessary initiatives for peaceful repatriation of the million Rohingya as it is a massive economic and social burden for a country like Bangladesh while thanking the ambassador for their continuous aid for maintaining the refugees in Bangladesh. He hoped that Korea and Bangladesh can join hands to develop Bangladesh's frozen food sector development and many other sectors in the future.

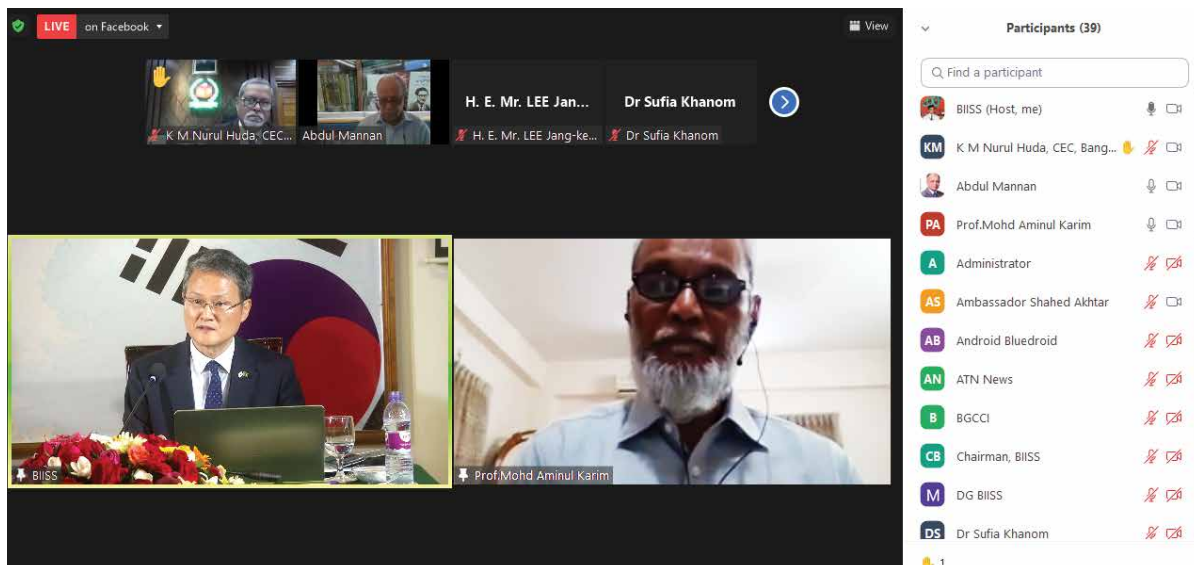


In response, **Ambassador Lee** thanked Mr. Abdul Mannan for sharing his thoughts and highlighting the deep relations between Bangladesh and Korea. Ambassador Lee said his goal is to strengthen ties between two countries as it is about to celebrate fifty years of diplomatic ties. The ambassador thinks to look back to the 50 years of diplomatic engagement and see how it was going on then and how to improve in coming days. Assessing where we started and what are we doing now, to identify where the scope for betterment which should be amplified and fully utilized if there is any area and any elements, that is lacking or missing area to be addressed. H.E Mr. Lee thanked Chairman Ambassador Fazlul karim and Professor Mannan for sharing personal experiences. He added that Rohingya Refugee issue is not just concern for Bangladesh but also an important global issue and we all have to work together as a whole to resolve the crisis. The ambassador highly appreciated the role of Bangladesh to host almost a million refugees and noted that Korea will try to assist Bangladesh to resolve the crisis.



**Professor Dr Md Aminul Karim**, Independent University, Bangladesh, asked what is Ambassador Lee's suggestion to enhance the export basket of Bangladesh, especially to Korea, as the Ambassador has projected a very minimal trade till now and how can Bangladesh improve that.

**Ambassador Lee** in response stated that he took a lot of effort to explain the bilateral trade relations and in the aspect of developing further trade and investments, Korea and Bangladesh are working together to bring positive improvement in the coming days. In that regard, H.E Mr. Lee mentioned about his surprise finding that there was no direct cargo airline service with Korea. Korea is open towards any trade engagement with Bangladesh as it is a very potent and emerging regional economy but is missing many quality business opportunities due to lacking in this aspect. There are many more facilities Bangladesh has with India and China but none as far as Korea is concerned. Therefore, the Ambassador thinks of starting a direct cargo line between Bangladesh and Korea, which will significantly improve the trade relations between the two countries.







**K M Nurul Huda**, Chief Election Commissioner, Bangladesh, said that Professor Mannan rightly crafted the journey of the Bangladesh-Korea relationship since Bangladesh's inception. From then, Korea has become one of the most significant development partners. Then focused on the aspect of election in Korea and Bangladesh's partnership in terms of the election management body.

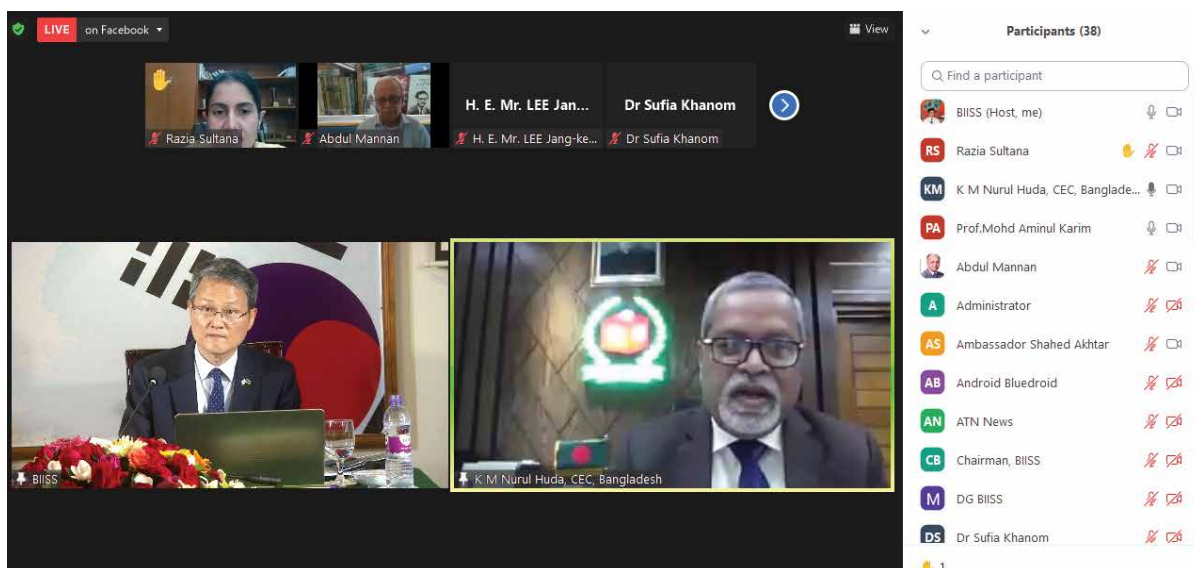
Korea is the pioneer of introducing a world election association body, namely the "Association of World Election Bodies (A-WEB)," comprising 118 Election Management Bodies (EMB) from 108 countries. Its headquarter is in Korea, and Mr. Jonghyun Choe is the general secretary of this organization. Bangladesh had an opportunity of sending our people to Korea for training purposes regarding the election aspects.

Regarding trade and development, the CEC stated that it started in 1981 with only 0.5 per cent RMG export under the pioneering leadership of DAEWOO, the prominent Korean investor, but now, it is needless to mention how significant the Korean investment is. The investments of the Korean government help the development efforts of Bangladesh. These investments are made in different sectors, not merely confined within the government sectors.

Historically, Korea has started bringing diversification in development activities in the 60s under the leadership of Park Chung-hee. He was the leader of giving the country a shape of development orientation. He survived with his activities from 1961 to 1979 until he was assassinated. He kept the country with a very positive dimension and activities. Because of the leadership of Park Chung-hee, the country has been oriented toward development and peace.

CEC concluded with this remark that peace is essential for development. Peace is the precondition for development, not war, and Korea is such an example. It was engaged in war and conflict earlier, but now it has come to peace and harmony. With peace and harmony, the country achieved massive development globally and can contribute through their development efforts and activities in other neighboring countries.

In response, **Ambassador Lee** thanked the CEC for raising some important points of cooperation between the two countries and mentioned that Korea was always willing to help Bangladesh in any developmental activities and in future both countries will explore new areas of cooperation.



# Summing up by the Chair



**Ambassador M Fazlul Karim**

*Chairman, BISS*

In his concluding remarks, **Ambassador M Fazlul Karim**, Chairman, BISS, stated that the whole discussion was very stimulating which demonstrates the keen interest of experts and observers in Bangladesh-ROK relations. He feels really optimistic about the bright future of participants. However, a number of points have emerged which, he noted are crucial for Bangladesh-ROK relations.

First and foremost, Bangladesh has a lot to learn from the development experience of ROK. As we are on our way to achieve the target of having a developed and prosperous country by 2041. The export-led and inclusive growth approach has drawn attention to everyone. Bilateral trade volume is still low and they need to redouble efforts to significantly enhance it. Signing off an FTA can be of help in this regard.

Secondly, ROK has created some renowned global brands like Samsung, Hyundai, LG etc. from whose experience we can benefit.

Thirdly, expectations from ROK about investments in Bangladesh are very high. We hope that South Korea would take the lead in establishing factories in the 100 SEZs that Bangladesh has been in the process of establishing. Korean IT farms can also invest in the high-tech parks of the country.

Fourthly, Bangladesh needs huge investment in upgrading her infrastructures. Here also ROK can significantly enhance her investment. She can also help us in the R&D field.

Fifthly, more joint venture companies can be established in producing agricultural appliances, cars and electronic items.

Sixthly, he hope that South Korea will continue to play a role in convincing the Myanmar authorities to take back their 1.1 million Rohingya nationals who are living in Bangladesh.

Lastly, given South Korea's increasing demand for skilled manpower, Bangladesh can be an important source in this regard.



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