Interview with Ambassador Harun ur Rashid (2nd, March 2013: Dhaka)

Interviewers: Reena Marwah and Swaran Singh

Mr. Harun ur Rashid, Barrister-at-Law served as Ambassador of Bangladesh for twelve years including as Ambassador/Permanent Representative to the UN, Geneva. He was Additional Foreign Secretary in mid 80s and Director General in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 70s. He spent a year as a Senior Fellow to the UN, New York and the World Court at The Hague in 1969.


Interview

I am Professor Swaran Singh from Jawaharlal Nehru University and I have the great pleasure to meet a man who I am reading since many years in the Indian newspaper, The Hindu. I am honored to interview Ambassador Harun ur Rashid who has a very interesting diplomatic career spanning over many years from the time of United Pakistan and then liberated Bangladesh.

Ambassador Rashid also has great interest in foreign affairs in general and authored many books which include Bangladesh Foreign Policy (2012) and Bangladesh-India Relations (2010).

As a young diplomat, he also had an opportunity of visiting China in the 1960s.

In the following transcription PS will be used for Professor Singh and HR for Ambassador Harun ur Rashid.

PS. Sir we start these interviews to go back as far as possible in your memory. So the first question generally is: in your childhood or adolescence, when did the word China first confront you and how?

HR. I come from a place called Vikrampur which is 25 miles from Dhaka. From Vikrampur, the great Buddhist monk Atish Dipankar (980-1063 AD) went to Tibet to preach Buddhism. The village, Bajrajogini, where he was born, is only one mile away from my village.

HR. In class 7th or 8th in school, I knew there was a country like China. In school we also knew that two Chinese travelers visited the territory which now constitute as Bangladesh and they have given glowing reports about the people and their socio-economic conditions. Thus the Chinese
were known to the Bengalis because there were a lot of exchanges between the two peoples. However, I got an opportunity to visit China only once in 1965.

PS. Indeed I would like to mention this; as scholars, our understanding in the case of United Pakistan is that a deeper, complex and wide spread relationship was with the East rather than the West Pakistan. The people’s movement, the left-of-center ideology i.e. the networking of China was greater with East Pakistan rather than West Pakistan.

HR. Yes, you are correct. It was prime minister of Pakistan, H.S. Suhrawardy (who hailed from Bengal was also a chief minister of United Bengal at the time of partition of British India in 1947) who built close relationship with China. Chou En Lai visited East Pakistan in 1956 when Suhrawardy was Prime Minister and Chou En-lai addressed a vast gathering in Dhaka.

According to some analysts, the friendship with China served another purpose for Pakistan. In the power game for Asian leadership to which India had laid its claim, Pakistan wanted to assert itself by deepening close ties with China.

Sheikh Mujib had also toured China twice much before the independence of Bangladesh and was reportedly impressed by that country even though he saw the limitations of the oppressive side of China’s governance.

PS. He was also known to have a reputation of being pro-West and not liking China.

HR: Yes, you are right. However, when I was working in the Foreign Office, Pakistani leaders felt that they needed a strong power to counter India. Therefore, Pakistan was establishing relations with China and the US while India was in the pro-Soviet camp.

One of the main pillars of Pakistan’s foreign policy was focused to integrate Kashmir with Pakistan. Kashmir outside Pakistan is a negation for the ideological basis of Pakistan. As a Muslim majority state, Kashmir should be a part of Pakistan, according to the two nation theory. On the other hand, for India to prove itself a secular country, it required a Muslim majority state within India and Kashmir was seen as confirmation of secularism in India. Regrettably the issue of Kashmir has become an important factor for destabilization for South Asia.

PS. But your visit to China was before you join the foreign service?

HR. I was already in the Foreign Office when I visited China.

PS. You joined the Foreign Service as a young officer under training. During your training, was there any emphasis on learning Chinese or sending people to see China?

HR. Yes, there was an emphasis on China but I was included in the delegation possibly because of my legal background. Before joining the service, I earned the professional degree of Barrister-at-Law from London. I was sent to places where there could be legal issues arising out of
political problems with Pakistan. I was involved in the arbitration of the Rann of Kutch between Pakistan and India in the 60s.

I went to Peking in 1965. I recall that while going to China, we took a flight from Karachi and interestingly flew via Rawalpindi, Kashmir, the Himalayan range and then to China. The route was very unusual to go to Beijing.

PS. When was this?

HR. 1965, 30th September.

PS. After the Indo-Pakistan war?

HR. Yes. Our mission was led by the Defence Minister. I was not at a very senior position but I guess our visit to China was to buy arms and weapons after the Indo-Pak 1965 war. But formally, we were invited to witness the celebration of the Chinese National Day on 1st October in Peking. We left Karachi at 8am and reached Beijing at 3pm; called Peking during that time. As I was from Pakistan I got the privilege to meet the Chinese leaders and shake hands with them.

I met with Mao Tse-tung personally and shook hands with him; Chou En-lai, Chu Teh and Marshal Chen Yi: the pipe smoking leader. I was most impressed with Chou En-lai. I will tell you why. When the Chinese delegation and the Pakistani delegation stood for a group photograph, Chou En-lai came forward and told the camera man to check if everyone in front was in straight line or not. Thereafter he joined with the Chinese delegation and stood there for the photograph.

PS. Was Mao very alert?

HR. Mao was nearly 73 but his mental alertness still impresses me even today. However, I lost the album containing the photographs with the top Chinese leaders while escaping from Pakistan via Afghanistan to Bangladesh.

PS. Sir, would you tell us in detail your impression of these great leaders you met in China?

HR. I thought outwardly Mao Tse-tung looked like a primary school teacher- very calm and composed. One could not ignore a big mole on his face. Little did I realize from his face that he was planning the so-called “Cultural Revolution” next year.

Chou En-lai was smart and very alert. Marshal Chen Yi was a smiling diminutive figure with whom you could easily relate to and Chu Teh was a reserved person. There were hardly any cars on the main roads in Peking then and one could see people riding only cycles. We were taken to see a commune near Peking.

PS. What did you see in the commune?
HR. In China, no one is allowed to have private land at the time. Everyone has to grow crops in a commune and sell the produce to the government at a set price. The farmers can keep some produce for themselves. The commune near Peking was called Romania Chinese commune.

In the commune there are big loud speakers on which a local communist leader announces the plan for the day. I was surprised to see the discipline, dedication, structural organization and so much control by a regime at the village level. The people had no freedom. I was impressed by the determination in the Chinese which is essential to develop a country but not the type of regimentation. Two-three generations sacrificed and suffered in China for the progress and prosperity that we witness now in that country.

PS. In your delegation, did you have any conversations about the impressions you all had about the Chinese leaders?

HR. When I came back I wrote an article, stating that China will rise but there is strict regimentation. I also stated that the article represents my own view. After my article a point came up whether a benevolent dictator is required to take a developing country forward: Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore and Park Chung-hee of South Korea are examples for progress in developing countries. The biggest question that arises from time to time is: would a democracy like that of Britain be suitable for a developing country where one third of the population don’t know what they are voting for?

PS. Was the environment during Mao Tse-tung reverent of Mao? What was your impression at that time.

HR. Yes, It is true that he was a revered person in China. He was a like a demi-god to Chinese people. During my short visit to China, we were taken to the lake near Peking where Mao used to swim. We delegates also saw the Great Wall, Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City.

We watched a short play in which Mao Tse-tung’s wife was involved in writing and preparing the play in which a feudal lord had to flee because of the communist revolution. I did not speak to her but I saw her. I was also impressed by the calisthenics which was practiced before all the delegates at a Peking stadium. The whole country seemed to be on a “war-footing”. This was my impression of China at that time.

Another thing I noticed is that although under communism, every person is considered as being equal with each other, the Chinese leaders rode in big black cars and had separate lifts in the office buildings.

PS. You said you came back from China and wrote an article in which you gave the impression that China will rise. Was there any response to your article by your friends or the people you knew?
HR. The response to my article was not great. In those days the rise of China did not make much difference to the people. I did not write in a West Pakistan paper but in the Pakistan Observer, an East Pakistan paper. I published my article with great difficulty in the Observer. The owner of the paper was a person who was anti-communist so he did not want me to publish or print anything about Communist China. But the editor agreed to publish my article. He said it necessary for the benefit of the readers and allowed the article to be published.

PS. In those days the editors were very powerful. Tell us about your experiences when you shifted from Pakistan to Bangladesh. Again China was very noticeable. East Pakistan was much closer to China but once it declared liberation, China refused to recognize Bangladesh.

HR. China and the US played a very negative role during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971. I have written about this in one of my books titled *Foreign Policy of Bangladesh*..

As I recall I had given some reasons for Chinese support to Pakistan. First, China was wooing the US after a rift with the Soviet Union and they started the ping-pong diplomacy to get closer to the US. Henry Kissinger of the United States secretly visited Beijing through Pakistan in 1971 and China was grateful to Pakistan. Second, the Chinese thought the Bengali nationalism was stirred by India to weaken its ally Pakistan. Third, China had separatist movements in Tibet and Xinjiang and the Chinese believed that if they supported Bangladesh that it would encourage separatists of China to secede from China.

PS. Was there anything in Bangladesh’s Foreign policy’s approach which could have made the five years distance [of China’s non-recognition] little less?

HR. Ambassador K. M. Kaisar, a Bengali, was Pakistan’s ambassador to China from 1967 to 1971. Ambassador Kaisar was very close to Chou En-lai and other Chinese top leaders.

However, Ambassador Kaiser left Peking and arrived in Dhaka in May 1972. He reported that Prime Minister Chou En-lai had met him before his departure and expressed the view that in time relations would develop between China and Bangladesh. Kaiser was made Bangladesh ambassador to Myanmar. From Myanmar he continued to keep links with Chinese top leaders. In this way, he played a link between China and Bangladesh in the early 70s.

Prof. G. W. Chowdhury, a Bengali and a Minister of President Yahaya’s cabinet (who was General Yahya’s Constitutional Adviser), wrote a book titled *United Pakistan* in which he believed that until China did not receive a green signal from Pakistan, China would not recognize Bangladesh.

China vetoed in August in 1972 Bangladesh’s entry to the UN because Pakistan’s POWs were held in India. The Chinese told us that until the POWs did not return to Pakistan from India they would not support us.
PS. As we all no Sir, India had already signed the Simla agreement and returned the 93,000 POWs. The process was taking time because the POWs could not decide where to go. They use to regularly broadcast their request on All India Radio so that their families could recognize them and they can come back home. It was not that they were not being sent. So the excuse was not justified.

HR. If I recall correctly Pakistan had lodged a case with the International Court of Justice in May 1973 for an order from the court restraining India transferring the Pakistani prisoners of war for trial by Bangladesh. India did not accept the Court’s jurisdiction and the case was rejected in July 1973. The retention of the POWs of Pakistan was a big political issue for Pakistan, and China supported Pakistan on the issue.

But in the meantime, China softened their stance on the issue because of K. M. Kaisar’s informal relations with the Chinese top leaders and after repatriation of prisoners of war to Pakistan, China supported Bangladesh’s membership to the UN in July 1974. China, however, recognized Bangladesh after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib in 1975 and the rest is history.

PS. Wasn’t it a bad timing for China to recognize Bangladesh?

HR. Yes, indeed it was a bad timing by China. However they felt that Bangladesh should not be totally within the orbit of Indian influence and relationship with Bangladesh must soon be developed.

I have realized one thing in my diplomatic career: the two countries which always keep their words; once they give their commitment, are Iran and China. I don’t trust other countries but Iran and China will stand by you even if there is only country to vote for Bangladesh at international forums.

PS. You are saying that China recognized Bangladesh only after Pakistan’s green signal?

HR. Yes, after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder of the nation, China recognized Bangladesh and Pakistan commenced its diplomatic relations with Bangladesh, although Pakistan had to recognize Bangladesh in February 1974 so as to enable Bangladesh to attend the summit of OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) in Lahore.

After the assassination, the Awami League leader Khondaker Mostaque Ahmed declared himself the President with the support of the armed forces. It is a puzzle to us even today after the assassination of the great leader how other Awami league leaders could join the Mostaque government.

PS. Mostaque’s government still had people from the Awami league.
HR. Yes. Later Mostaque formed his own Democratic League party. China thought they have to deal with the same people again as Mostaque, the former water resources minister, became the president.

There is also another big puzzle about how Sheikh Mujib, a life-long democrat, established only one party (BAKSAL- Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League) in Bangladesh. He also banned all newspapers and allowed government to publish four newspapers: two English and two Bengali.

We have also learnt that a few Awami League leaders conveyed to him that this was not the way for a country to proceed whose people fought the Liberation War against Pakistan. Two MPs resigned for introducing such undemocratic constitutional changes in the country.

PS. What do you think made him do this because he was a confident, popular and democratic leader?

HR. Yes, he was very popular. But I think his nephew had a great influence on him and the nephew was a leftist and belonged to pro-Moscow camp. It is noted Bangladesh sold jute goods to Cuba and as a retaliation, the US diverted its aid of food to Africa. As a result there was a famine in Bangladesh in 1974. Sheikh Mujib had many problems and he was advised that he could address these problems through unity of parties- meaning one party. Some say that Sheikh Mujib said that it was a temporary measure he had to take.

He wanted to keep Bangladesh away from the two superpowers of that time. I remember he said in one of his speeches that Bangladesh would be “the Switzerland of the East”. However, things did not work out the way he wanted because of the Friendship Treaty with India in March 1972.

When India withdrew its soldiers from Bangladesh, the latter had to sign a Friendship Treaty with India for a fixed period of 25 years and India had already signed a Treaty with the Soviet Union in August 1971. Therefore the western powers thought that Bangladesh was on the Soviet camp through India.

PS. After the liberation war, you along with other Bengali diplomats shifted to Dhaka?

HR. Yes, out of the 12 Bengali diplomats posted in Islamabad, only two remained in Pakistan.

PS. In short, you laid the foundation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bangladesh. Tell us about the whole process?

HR. We modeled a ministry but not in a very innovative way I must say. We took a building and my senior colleagues modeled the office on the lines of the Pakistan foreign office. A foreign secretary and director generals and so on were appointed.

PS. In this new office, how was China placed institutionally. Was there a China department or China unit?
HR. No, there was a Far East Desk which included China.

PS. Was there a change in Bangladesh’s approach after the coup and assassination of Mujib?

HR. There was a 180 degree turn in Bangladesh’s foreign policy after August 1975. The country became friendly with China, US and other Islamic countries. This trend was started by President Mostaque but later pursued robustly by General Zia-ur-Rahman. The Ziaur Rahman government deported about 70 Soviet diplomats. The relations with India became very strained.

I imagine that as President Zia-ur-Rahman did not come to power through ballots, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi closed all cooperative ties with Bangladesh. At that time, I was the Director General of South Asia.

I could see Mrs Indira Gandhi’s perception. She thought that Major-General Ziaur Rahman had a hand in the assassination of Sheikh Mujib.

When you punish the government, it is the people who suffer and not the government. For instance, when you don’t give the Ganges water to the people of Bangladesh, they suffer and not the government.

I believe that because of hard stance by Indira Gandhi towards Bangladesh, it became more closer to China, the US and other Islamic countries. I also believe that the SAARC was conceived during this time.

I was one of the key members of the delegation which negotiated the first Ganges Water Sharing Treaty in 1977. The talks regarding the sharing of waters of the Ganges began in 1976 and under Indira government no progress was made. Bangladesh took the water issue to the UN in 1976 and received overwhelming support from other countries at the General Assembly. India realized that the only way was to agree to negotiations and the GA Assembly did not vote but made a consensus statement for early negotiations with Bangladesh.

Meanwhile in 1977 Indira Gandhi lost the election and Morarji Desai became the Prime Minister. Relations with Bangladesh had improved greatly.

During the negotiations, my counterpart was Joint Secretary Muchkund Dubey of the India’s Ministry of External Affairs and at the time the Foreign Secretary was Jagat Mehta. Mehta’s views were very objective and I was very impressed by him. He was India’s ambassador to China and then became the Foreign Secretary under the Desai government. Mehta understood that this problem needed to be solved to maintain good relations with Bangladesh.

PS. As you know, 1975-76 were difficult times for Mrs. Indira Gandhi also.

HR. We negotiated under Prime Minister, Morarji Desai and surprisingly Vajpayee was the foreign minister. I was very impressed by him. He was a very objective man. He was very
forthcoming although he was a BJP man. I have lot of respect for him as a Foreign Minister and I also felt he was a very successful minister.

PS. China recognized Bangladesh solely after Pakistan’s green signal. Did China facilitate any relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan?

HR. No, because there were three issues to be settled with Pakistan. One is regarding Pakistan’s apology to Bangladesh for the atrocities committed in March 1971 on innocent civilian Bengalis. The Pakistani’s are avoiding an apology by using phrases like “regretting the mistake of the past.”.

The second issue is regarding the apportionment of assets of united Pakistan. All the foreign assets were used in building Pakistan’s assets, such as, buildings of diplomatic missions overseas, planes and ships. We did not get any assets. In 1974, I sat with the Bangladesh Planning Commission and calculated minimum of $4 billion dollars worth of assets from Pakistan.

And the third issue is the repatriation of Urdu–speaking nationals in Bangladesh who opted to go to Pakistan. There were about 200,000 people who opted for Pakistan after Bangladesh was liberated. Recently the High Court of Bangladesh has delivered a judgment stating that minors could live in Bangladesh but not the adults who opted for Pakistan in 1972.

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had tried to bring the refugee back to Pakistan. However, Pakistan does not want more Urdu speaking people. Moreover, President Zia-ul-Haque passed a law preventing Urdu-speaking people to come to Pakistan.

PS. So, Bangladesh did not receive foreign assets [like Embassy offices].

HR. No.

PS. None of your foreign embassy’s /missions were inherited from Pakistan?

HR. Not even one.

PS. So, you had to start from scratch in all areas?

HR. When a country gets separated from another country, succession does not apply legally. So, we had to go through all the treaties that Pakistan had entered with other countries one by one. The treaties that did not help Bangladesh at all were called “odious” treaties.

We accepted only those that helped the people or used for infrastructure in Bangladesh. So my team had to go through all the treaties. Our criteria for accepting the treaty was that it had accrued benefits to the people of Bangladesh.

PS. There is a stereotype image amongst people outside Bangladesh that the two major parties [Awami League and Bangladesh National Party] have a different policy towards China. The
BNP is very comfortable with China while the Awami League keeps its distance from China. Is there any such distinction and does it matter in the real world?

HR. I do not think the perception is correct. As people of Bangladesh want friendly relations with China, both parties must maintain good relations with China. However the emphasis could be different.

PS. But Sir, in today’s newspaper the Awami League is also talking about Islam, nation and democracy.

HR. This, they can say, because 88% of Bangladesh people are Muslims but the use of Islam is non-communal. The people of Bangladesh fought the Liberation War in 1971 on the basis of Bengali ethnicity and not on the basis of religion. The Pakistanis and most Bengali are Muslims but fought against each other. What does it signify? It means that religion is a tenuous bond.

It is the Bengali ethnicity that is important. I can change my religion, I can become a Hindu or a Christian but I cannot change my ethnicity, the Bengali blood.

The word “secularism” borrowed from the West is a misunderstood term. We use the term in Bengali “Dharma-neropakhata” (neutral position of the state from any religion) that means state and religion are separate. Religion is personal while the state includes people of multiple faiths.

The ordinary people think that secularism means atheism that is non-belief in religion. The word should be non-communalism and not secularism. Bangladesh is a multi-religion, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic country. However, the word used in the constitution is secularism which is a rejection of communalism. The Awami League has to use Islam to convey the message to ordinary people that it is not anti-Islam.

PS. Going back to the question does the different approach by both the parties make a difference in Bangladesh’s relationship with China as and when there is a change in the ruling party?

HR. I told you earlier that the people of Bangladesh have favourable attitude toward China. Firstly, because there is no border issue with China as the two countries don’t share a common border. Therefore, the traditional border issues/disputes are absent.

Secondly, China has built six bridges in Bangladesh as of today. While going to my locality Vikrampur, I cross a Chinese bridge. On the other hand, India has unfortunately not built a single bridge in Bangladesh. There is not a single massive infrastructure built by India in Bangladesh that I can show to my people. India is building auditoriums in Uganda and Kenya, and parliament in Afghanistan but nothing in Bangladesh. It seems there is a perception that those countries are more important to India than Bangladesh.

PS. China is visible as a friend.
HR. Yes. Currently, China is proposing the 7th Chinese bridge in Bangladesh. Bridges are very important as they are not only symbolic of friendship but also facilitate economic activity among regions of the country. When the non-aligned summit was going to be held in Bangladesh in 2001, (later postponed) China built a vast conference centre in Dhaka with its own fund and made a gift to Bangladesh.

PS. There is another issue of trade deficit with China.

HR. The trade deficit is more with China than that of with India. I think India has failed miserably in PR [public relations] relations with people of Bangladesh. It has not been able to build even a single infrastructure for Bangladesh as a symbol of friendship.

Could India do anything at this time? I know India has a difficult budget situation but the construction of the Padma Bridge in Bangladesh is an excellent opportunity for India to build something visible for Bangladesh. One or two billion dollars is nothing for India, given the annual GDP of $1.9 trillion dollar. India could help us.

PS. Since 2005, China is an observer of the SAARC [South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation] and the most active one as well.

HR. India brought Afghanistan in the SAARC. It is India’s fault as Afghanistan, in my view, is not a part of South Asia. To counterbalance India’s move, Pakistan got China as an observer. It is all based on political considerations.

As a former diplomat of an active member-country of the SAARC, I cannot understand why India brought Afghanistan in the regional organization of South Asia which is a fixed geographical entity. . Sri Lanka wanted to be a part of the ASEAN in the past but was rejected because it was not part of South East Asia..

PS. China is still an observer and not a member of the SAARC?

HR. Once India opened the gate of SAARC to Afghanistan, I won’t be surprised if other countries including Bangladesh would lend their support to make China as SAARC’s member to bring dynamism in it.

PS. Bangladesh will be in China’s favour if it decides to join the SAARC [as full member]?

HR. Yes, because of the relationship. Even the present leader of China, Xi Jinping visited Bangladesh in 2011 while he was the Vice-President. During the visit he has given a grant of $5 million to Bangladesh.

PS. Sir, I am very careful in asking you this question. As you are open to Chinese investments in Bangladesh and the member of the SAARC, aren’t you concerned about China’s policies and [nature of] regime?
HR. China’s dispute with its neighbours in the South China Sea is a concern. I told a private delegation that had visited from China that China’s policy in claiming the islands is very aggressive. It claims to be a peace-loving country. But China’s policy does not show that policy.

Even China’s policy in Tibet is not helping the country. China needs to change its approach to win the confidence of South East Asian countries. Yes, you are correct that China is a concern but in a country like Bangladesh, where 30 per cent of the population live below poverty line money is welcome.

PS. Money brings help, development and poverty alleviation so there always is an attraction towards money. China is an economic superpower as it has emerged as the largest trading partner. But US still remains the world’s security power [leader]. Do you think Bangladesh will have to choose from the two countries?

HR. It would be wrong to suggest that Bangladesh will have to choose between India and China or between China and United States. We can have relations with both and our relations with one country are not at the expense of the other. We need India, China and the US because of Bangladesh’s socio-economic development. Our biggest enemy is poverty.

PS. Sir, you are a celebrated writer and a columnist. I personally read your articles in The Hindu. How do you view Bangladesh’s China community?. Is there a formal community that debates on issues related to China?

HR. There is no Chinese community as such but there is an informal Bangladesh-China Association which includes political leaders, military officers and former ambassadors. On the 9th February 2013 the Association celebrated new Chinese Year of the Snake. It was the Bangladesh-China association that had invited me and the Chinese ambassador was also present. There are few private think-tanks which occasionally discuss Bangladesh

PS. Other than the occasional meetings is there any vibrant debate on China in the print media, television and seminars.

HR. Yes, there is discussion regarding Bangladesh’s relations with India and China in TV talk-shows and in think-tanks. There is a view that Bangladesh should not tilt either towards India or China. Bangladesh should also extend friendship with Russia as lately it is emerging to have a bigger role in Pakistan. Thus, there is a need to take into account of the geo-political shift in Bangladesh’s foreign policy.

PS. It is the network and connectivity that is making Bangladesh to emerge as a hub of economic activity [in the region]?

HR. Bangladesh faces three major challenges. At the national level what measures should Bangladesh take to maintain high and sustainable economic growth. At the regional level, how to promote interactions with regional countries to maintain high economic growth with all modes
of connectivity in the region. Lastly at the global level, what role, should Bangladesh play to ensure an advantage in the geopolitical shift to Asia–Pacific region.

I can be candid that I am disappointed with one thing. India did not show an active interest in Bangladesh’s proposal for a sub-regional unit, called the Quadrangle. The Northeastern states of India Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh can become an economic hub due to exploitation of their combined natural and human resources.

According to me the BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar) will be very slow because of the political tensions among some member-countries. Economic relations are always determined by political relations. Trade relations between India and Bangladesh have increased from one million to five hundred million dollars in 2012 because the two countries have good political relations. India has also lifted the ban on the sensitive commodities list.

PS. Last question sir, what is Bangladesh’s unique selling point for China to be so enthusiastic in trading with the country?

HR. Our geographical location including its access to the Indian Ocean via the Bay of Bengal.

PS. Thank you, Sir.

HR; It is a pleasure to have you in Dhaka.