

KL Posting Much Sought After By Indian Diplomats
Bernama
12 Julai, 2013
By Manik Mehta

NEW YORK, July 12 (Bernama) -- A major reshuffle taking place in the present constellation of senior Indian diplomatic posts could have led to a new face heading the Indian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur.

The diplomatic chatter that goes on among Indian diplomats and sources close to South Block, as India's Foreign Office in New Delhi is called, suggests that the Kuala Lumpur mission is one of the diplomatic posts which ambassadorial candidates are vying to get.

Vijay Gokhale, the present Indian High Commissioner in Kuala Lumpur, has already completed three years in the Malaysian capital, the duration, generally, of an Indian ambassador's overseas posting, even though postings can be extended or shortened depending on exigency and/or other compelling reasons.

"I believe there are quite a few candidates among senior diplomats in South Block who would be only too happy to move to Kuala Lumpur which is considered a good posting for the present batch of ambassadorial appointments.

But, as it turns out, the Indian government is planning to let Ambassador Gokhale continue his assignment in Kuala Lumpur, thus ending any speculation of who would succeed the present incumbent," an Indian foreign service expert told Bernama on the condition of anonymity.

Gokhale, as South Block acknowledges, has built up a strong foothold in Asean through his work in Malaysia, seen in India as an important link to the community which is forging a high level of economic integration and which already has a combined GDP of an estimated US\$3.8 trillion (RM12.04 trillion).

India's two-way trade with Malaysia has surged to US\$14 billion (RM44.36 billion) in 2012-13, up from US\$2.5 billion (RM7.92 billion) in 2008.

Indian and Malaysian experts attribute this surge to the India-Malaysia Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) signed in July 2011, setting the stage for "incredible growth potential" in the future.

India has, obviously, eyed the development of Asean towards the Asean Economic Community in 2015, when it will boast of a single market and production base besides creating a competitive economic region of equitable economic development and a region fully integrated into the global economy.

India, on its part, is Asia's third largest economy and wants closer ties with Malaysia which is seen as a moderate Muslim nation.

It is not surprising that India's corporate sector has been moving into Malaysia in a larger-than-usual fashion, with many companies converting their operations in that country into a regional base for conducting business with the entire Asean region.

Indeed, India's investments in Malaysia have surged to US\$3 billion (RM9.51 billion),

though not a large chunk of the investments flowed from third countries.

India's leading conglomerate, Reliance Industries Ltd, has alone invested nearly US\$500 million (RM1.58 billion). Indeed, it is ironical that Reliance's largest polyester plant Recron is based in Malaysia, and not in India.

Reliance has also recently acquired a British Petroleum refinery which will supply raw materials to this plant.

Other big Indian corporate names include Tech Mahindra in Cyberjaya.

The recent visit to New Delhi by Malaysian International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed also went down well in Indian circles.

India, which is part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement comprising Asean and six major nations, will evolve to become one of the most important free trading blocs in the world.

Indeed, India's inclusion in the RCEP, initially opposed by China, materialised with Malaysian support and that, in turn, speaks well of Gokhale's presence in Kuala Lumpur.

In the circumstances, South Block thought it prudent to let Gokhale "continue his good work" in Kuala Lumpur, as the diplomat interviewed said.

The game of India's diplomatic musical chairs began after Sujatha Singh, until recently Indian ambassador in Berlin, Germany, was appointed as India's new foreign secretary to succeed the present incumbent Rajan Mathai effective Aug 1.

This was Singh's second posting in Germany; she was a junior diplomat at the Indian Embassy in the then German capital Bonn in the early 1980s.

The post of a foreign secretary, generally limited to two years according to Indian foreign service traditions, is the pinnacle of an incumbent's successful service, and usually awarded when a candidate has retired or is close to retirement.

Singh completed her 59th year in July. Singh is the third woman foreign secretary, the other two being Nirupama Rao and Chokila Iyer.

Singh's name for the foreign secretary post figured with other prominent contenders but she prevailed in the end because of her seniority.

-- BERNAMA

Copyright © 2013 BERNAMA

Source: <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v7/newsindex.php?id=962713>