The United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, visited Bangladesh on June 25–26 at the invitation of the country’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a state guest. This was his first visit to Bangladesh at the preparatory meeting for the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial 2023. Bangladesh is one of the co-hosts for this event, along with Canada and Uruguay. This was a “brief but significant” visit for Dhaka, as he met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the Minister and State Minister of Foreign Affairs, the chiefs of the Bangladesh Army, Navy, and Air Force, and the head of the Bangladesh Police.

Events during Lacroix’s Bangladesh visit

Jean-Pierre Lacroix is the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations. He brings to the position over 25 years of political and diplomatic experience, with a focus on multilateral organisations and United Nations activities and programmes. Mr. Lacroix served from 2014 to 2017 as Director for United Nations, International Organizations, Human Rights, and Francophonie at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr. Lacroix’s Dhaka visit was aimed at gaining more commitment from Bangladesh to the UN Peacekeeping Mission in the future. The UN is looking for more deployments from Bangladesh as some member states are pulling out their peacekeepers from field missions. He visited at a time when various groups in Dhaka and abroad were campaigning for Bangladesh to be banned from UN peacekeeping missions. But the UN peacekeeping chief proved them wrong and pledged to take more peacekeepers from Bangladesh. During his visit, Lacroix assured that he would give special consideration to the recruitment of more peacekeepers, which is very encouraging and positive for Bangladesh. He made the assurance when he met acting army chief Lt. Gen. Ataul Hakim Sarwar Hasan at the military headquarters in Dhaka. At the meeting, they exchanged greetings and discussed various issues related to the UN peacekeeping mission. Also, he attended a preparatory discussion for the 2023 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial, which is scheduled to be held in Ghana on December 5–6, 2023. This was the first time the current

head of UN peace operations visited Bangladesh, so the visit itself had symbolic value for the country. However, apart from its symbolic significance, Lacroix’s visit to Bangladesh is important for both Bangladesh and UN peacekeeping in several other aspects. Significance of Lacroix’s visit Before Lacroix’s visit, different anti-national forces propagated the idea that Mr. Lacroix was coming to Bangladesh intending to communicate a negative message to the Bangladesh Government regarding the UN mission. But during his visit, the UN peacekeeping chief was seen pledging to take more peacekeepers from Bangladesh. Not only did he pledge more recruitment from Bangladesh, but Lacroix also highly praised the contribution of Bangladeshi peacekeepers engaged in UN missions. As Head of UN Peace Operations, his visit had extra significance as Bangladesh is currently the top troop-contributing country (TCC) for UN peace operations despite huge competition among the member states. He also thanked Bangladesh and especially the Bangladesh Army for sending the highest number of peacekeepers in a long time. During the meeting, the appointment of Bangladeshis and especially women peacekeepers for important appointments in future peacekeeping missions was also discussed. Bangladesh has been in a leading position in the dynamic trend that the United Nations has developed in peacekeeping missions over the past few decades. Bangladesh has also been the number-one country for sending peacekeepers for the past few years. The number of members sent from Bangladesh is increasing every year. Bangladesh is also in a strong position in decision-making posts in peacekeeping missions. The UN would remain dependent on the few traditional providers of peacekeepers, such as Bangladesh, for conducting future peace operations. Since Bangladesh has not demonstrated any inclination to curtail its participation in UN peacekeeping so far, the country remains a reliable source for the recruitment of UN peacekeepers. Given the circumstances, Lacroix’s visit to Bangladesh was partially motivated by the desire on the part of the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) to keep this source of peacekeepers intact. On June 14, Human Rights Watch Chief Advocacy Officer Bruno Stagno Ugarte suggested in a press release that the UN Peacekeeping Chief should raise rights concerns in Bangladesh. But Bangladeshi

peacekeepers have so far served the UN professionally, diligently, and dutifully. This factor, in addition to Dhaka’s reliability as a provider of peacekeepers, is going to keep Bangladesh an important part of the UN’s future peace operations. So, the visit of Lacroix is indicative of the UN’s confidence in Bangladeshi peacekeepers, and it is likely to pave the way for further cooperation between them in the future. In the international arena, Bangladesh is also contributing to global peace by providing the largest troops in UN peacekeeping missions. It has a glorious history of UN peacekeeping missions. Through their courage, dedication, and determination in fulfilling their international duties, Bangladeshi peacekeepers have earned the respect of the international community and acted as ‘live’ instruments of soft power for Bangladesh. Because of its prestigious contribution, Lacroix is pledging more troops from Bangladesh. The recent visit of the UN peacekeeping chief to Bangladesh indicates that the partnership between the UN DPO and Dhaka is strong and durable, and Bangladeshi ‘Blue Helmets’ are going to fulfil their international responsibilities by continuing to serve in UN peace operations. To establish the finest ties possible between Bangladesh and UN peacekeeping operations, this meeting played a successful role. It is hoped that Bangladesh’s and the UN’s peacekeeping relationship will open new windows of possibilities through this top-level official meeting.