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Foreign Affairs

New Government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Receives Support from International Community

Heads of state, governments, and international organizations from around the world reached out to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to congratulate her for winning the general elections that took place on January 5, and offered support for the new government.

The United States reiterated its commitment to continue working with the Bangladesh government. Deputy Spokesperson for the US State Department Marie Harf said, “.... We obviously work with governments who are elected.”¹

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Prsident Pranab Mukherjee, and Opposition BJP Leader LK Advani all called Prime Minister Hasina soon after the election to convey their greetings. Prime Minister Singh said, “India’s government and people will stand beside Bangladesh government and its people at all times.”²

China reaffirmed its support of the newly elected government in a letter from Premier Li Keqiang, who said he wanted to continue developing the “comprehensive and cooperative

partnership” between Bangladesh and China.³ Russian President Vladimir Putin also congratulated Sheikh Hasina and vowed to “engage in constructive partnership” with the newly elected government.⁴

H.E. Mr. Shahriar Alam Takes Office as New State Minister for Foreign Affairs

On January 12, 2014, H. E. MR. Shahriar Alam took office as the new State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh.



bdnews24.com

In his illustrious political career, State Minister Alam contributed a great deal to the parliamentary democracy in the country. As a member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Information, he helped finalize the draft of the Right to Information Act (RTI) and presented the RTI at various orientation programs for new members of parliament. He served as the Vice Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on

¹ "US to 'Work With' Hasina," *bdnews24.com*, 14 January 2014.

² "India to Stand by Bangladesh," *bdnews24.com*, 12 January 2014.

³ "After India, China backs Hasina Government," *bdnews24.com*, 13 January 2014.

⁴ "Putin Congratulates Hasina," *bdnews24.com*, 14 January 2014.

Climate Change, Education, and Poverty Reduction, and was also a member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Science and Technology.

As a successful entrepreneur in the readymade garment (RMG) sector, State Minister Alam has also donated his time and expertise to the community by running RMG sector training programs, funding student scholarships, and engaging various stakeholders to encourage development in the sector.

In his first meeting with foreign dignitaries, State Minister Alam sought the international community's support for the newly elected government's goals for the future. Addressing more than 50 resident diplomats in Dhaka from various countries on January 16, he said that Bangladesh wishes to be a peaceful, democratically stable, and economically sound country contributing to the prosperity of the region and the world as a whole. On the issue of a political dialogue with the BNP, State Minister Alam stated that the government was willing to engage the BNP provided that they renounced violence and cut off their connection to Jamaat-i-Islami.⁵

European Parliament Urges Ban of Terrorist Political Parties

The European Parliament issued a landmark resolution calling on Bangladesh to ban all parties who resort to terrorism and other violent means to achieve their political ends.⁶

Emphasizing the need for political parties in Bangladesh to develop a culture of mutual respect, the resolution also urged the BNP to distance itself from both Jamaat and Hefazat-i-Islami. The BNP has maintained a strategic partnership with Jamaat for more than 10 years, despite the fact that Jamaat and its student division, Islami Chhatra Shibir, have a history of engaging in wanton violence to cause unrest. The Hefazat movement also earned the BNP's overt support to destabilize the country and spread extremist ideas in the society.

US Envoy for Myanmar Visits Bangladesh

The US Senior Adviser on Myanmar, Judith Cefkin, visited Bangladesh from February 2 to February 3. During the visit, Senior Advisor Cefkin called on important government officials in Bangladesh, including Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque. They discussed a range of bilateral issues, including the persecution and violence against the Rohingya community in Myanmar, as well as the repatriation of

⁵ "Government Seeks International Community's Support," *The Daily Star*, 16 January 2014.

⁶ Sheikh Shahariar Zaman, "Europarl Urges BNP to Discard Jamaat and Hefazat," *Dhaka Tribune*, 17 January 2014.

undocumented refugees and Rohingyas in Bangladesh through bilateral dialogue.⁷

Bangladesh and India Reaffirm Partnership

Bangladesh and India have renewed their commitment to work together on various issues of mutual importance.

Speaking on the occasion of Indian Republic Day at a reception on January 26, Bangladesh Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, confirmed that Bangladesh would look forward to resolving differences through “mutual consultations, mutual respect, and mutual friendship.” Echoing the same sentiment, Indian High Commissioner Pankaj Saran said that India remains determined to finding solutions to unresolved bilateral issues by means of “dialogue and constant efforts.”⁸

In the month of January, two important bilateral visits took place between the two countries. Bangladesh Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed visited India soon after being sworn into office. While there, he emphasized the need for better regional connectivity among SAARC countries,⁹ and encouraged boosting Indian investment in Bangladesh.¹⁰ Sripriya Ranganathan, the Joint Secretary of the new Bangladesh and Myanmar division of the Indian

Ministry of External Affairs, also briefly visited Dhaka for three days to discuss important bilateral issues with the newly elected government.¹¹



Health Minister Mohammad Nasim (right) with Indian High Commissioner Pankaj Saran (left). (bdnews24.com)

Apart from traditional bilateral issues, Bangladesh and India have recently shown interest in expanding their relations on non-traditional issues, including health and medicine. Building upon the memorandum of understanding on health cooperation that the two states signed in February 2013, a joint working group is expected to meet soon to draft an action plan on the exchange of medical experts and trainers, as well as medical treatment and scientific research programs.¹²

⁷ "Don't Push Back Rohingyas," *The Daily Star*, 4 February 2014.

⁸ "Dhaka, Delhi renew pledge to settle issues," *bdnews24.com*, 27 January 2014.

⁹ "Tofail Advocates Regional Transit," *bdnews24.com*, 16 January 2014.

¹⁰ "Tofail, Saran Discuss Trade," *bdnews24.com*, 30 January 2014.

¹¹ "Indian Foreign Affairs Official in Dhaka," *bdnews24.com*, 21 January 2014.

¹² "Bangla, India to boost health," *bdnews24.com*, 22 January 2014.

US Sports Envoys Visit Bangladesh

Two American professional football players visited Bangladesh as representatives of the US State Department's 'SportsUnited' sports diplomacy program.¹³

Tony Sanneh and Linda Hamilton, former players for the US men and women national soccer teams, arrived on February 3 to lead intermediate and advanced workshops on skills for young football players. The program culminated on February 7 with a public exhibition match featuring the envoys, workshop participants, and professional players from the Bangladesh national football team.

¹³ Press Release, Embassy of the United States of America in Dhaka, 3 February 2014.

Governance

General Elections Held Successfully Despite Enormous Challenges

Despite unprecedented violence and mayhem orchestrated by the NP and Jamaat-e-Islami, the Election Commission successfully held the general elections held in Bangladesh on January 5. The Bangladesh Awami League, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, received a landslide popular mandate to form a government for another term of five years.



Reuters

The Awami League won a total of 232 out of 300 parliamentary seats in the 10th parliamentary elections, with the Jatiya Party winning 33 seats and the remainder going to other parties. The Awami League therefore have a two-thirds majority in the House.¹⁴

Although the deliberate violence and disruptions caused by the boycotting opposition parties made turnout for the elections a lower-than-desired 40 percent, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared the elections a victory for democracy that “clearly manifested the wishes

of the people of Bangladesh for peace, constitutional discourse, and progress.”¹⁵

New Cabinet Takes Oath

On January 12, President Mohammad Abdul Hamid swore in a 49-member cabinet of ministers, state ministers, and deputy ministers of the newly elected government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.¹⁶

23 ministers were newly appointed to the government, while many others had served in Prime Minister Hasina’s previous governments or in the poll-time multiparty government formed by the Prime Minister during her last term.¹⁷ Details about the Cabinet members are available at pmo.gov.bd.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Urges for Communal Harmony

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina unequivocally declared that the people of Bangladesh believe in communal harmony, and that violence against minorities wrought by third parties and terrorist organizations will not be tolerated.

Speaking at rallies and public engagements across the country, Prime Minister Hasina bemoaned the vandalism and destruction incited by the BNP and Jamaat-i-Islami in many

¹⁵ "January 5 Poll a Victory of Democracy: PM," *BSS News*, 6 January 2014.

¹⁶ "49-Member AL-Led Cabinet Takes Charge," *bdnews24.com*, 12 January 2014.

¹⁴ "AL Wins Three-Fourths of House Seats," *The Daily Star*, 6 January 2014.

districts in Bangladesh. She reaffirmed the peaceful and secular foundations of Bangladesh's society, saying, "We will also not tolerate anybody's interference in the rights of others. [...] We have ensured the rights of people from all religious faiths bringing amendment to the constitution."¹⁸

During some of her visits to affected areas, the Prime Minister distributed checks to the families of those affected by the unrest and instructed law enforcement agencies to put it in their top-most priority to ensure the safety and security of the minority community.

Government Launches Country-Wide Vaccination Campaign

On January 25, Bangladesh's Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) launched a nation-wide campaign aiming to vaccinate 52 million children with the combined measles and rubella (MR) vaccine.¹⁹

The three-week-long campaign plans to target children between the ages of nine months and 15 years, nearly a third of Bangladesh's population. The first week of the campaign will take place in schools across the nation, before moving to 120,000 community centers on February 1. Children under five years of age will

also receive an oral polio dose in addition to the MR vaccine.



UNICEF (via GAVI Alliance)

This latest initiative comes after the EPI replaced the measles-only vaccine with the MR vaccine in September 2012. The measles-only vaccine was administered in a similar campaign in 2006, which successfully vaccinated 32 million children between the ages of nine months and 10 years and significantly reduced occurrences of measles. According to the EPI, only 1.4 in a million Bangladeshis contracted measles in 2013, compared to more than 19 in a million cases of rubella.

The EPI's campaign is supported by the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI), which has given Bangladesh awards twice in recognition of its immunization achievements.

1 Million Rural Farmers to be Trained

The government has approved a \$55.4 million plan to train 1 million rural farmers in the ways of integrated farm management by establishing

¹⁷ Shamim Ahmed, Suliman Niloy and Shahidul Islam, "Anisul Haq Law, Nasim Health Minister," *bdnews24.com*, 12 January 2014.

¹⁸ "Attackers of Hindus to be Punished," *The Daily Star*, 24 January 2014.

¹⁹ Nurul Islam Hasib, "Measles-Rubella Vaccination Drive," *bdnews24.com*, 20 January 2014.

20,000 farmers' field schools across the country.²⁰

The farmer training initiative will accompany the existing national agriculture and new agriculture extension policies by improving the capacity of landless, small, and marginalized farmers to increase their agriculture production. More than a thousand farmers' organizations will also be established to help facilitate this process.

Alongside the farmers, the program will provide training and employment opportunities to the several thousand farmers' trainers, divisional trainers, field school inspectors, and other officials who will be needed to implement the initiative effectively.

The project will be financed with the help of the Danish International Development Agency, and is expected to be completed in full by November 2018.

Major Development Projects Prioritized

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina highlighted several major infrastructure development projects whose completion will boost Bangladesh's economic development.²¹

The Padma River bridge, Rooppur nuclear power plant, the construction of a liquefied

natural gas terminal, and metro rail development were all noted as of particular importance at the new government's first meeting of the Project Monitoring Committee on January 22.

Recently, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) renewed its interest in funding some of the projects, which has added impetus to the government's push to complete these initiatives within the shortest possible time.

In addition to the existing plans for the Rooppur nuclear power plant, the Prime Minister is keen to bolster Bangladesh's energy capacity and is currently considering a joint power production plan with neighboring SAARC countries.

2 Power Plants to be Constructed

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) approved the construction of a coal-fired power plant in Barapukuria and a heavy fuel oil power plant in Chapainawabganj. Funding for both of these plants will be provided by both the government and foreign donors, such as the Industrial and Commerce Bank of China and the Hong Kong Shanghai Banking Corporation. The Barapukuria plant is expected to be completed by November 2017.²²

²⁰ "Tk 432cr Project to Train 10 Lakh Rural Farmers, Boost Farm Produce," *The New Age*, 25 January 2014.

²¹ Abdur Rahim Harmachi, "6 Mega Projects in Fast Lane," *bdnews24.com*, 22 January 2014.

²² "Government Okays 2 Power Projects," *bdnews24.com*, 26 January 2014.

Business, Trade, Aid and Investment

Bangladesh Exports Reach New High as RMG Exports Surpass India

Bangladesh exports earned a total of \$29.1 billion in 2013, the highest figures recorded in the country's history. This represents a nearly 16 percent increase in exports from 2012 and amounts to an additional \$4 billion.²³

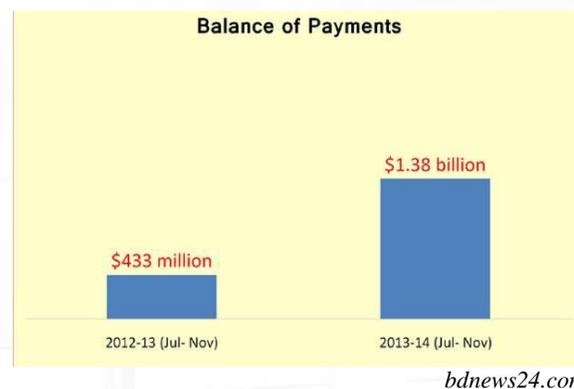
Much of the growth in export revenue can be attributed to the readymade garment industry, which earned \$23.5 billion and set a new record of its own. 2013 also saw Bangladesh's garment exports expand to new markets in countries both near and far, from India and Malaysia to Brazil and Australia.

In fact, Bangladesh's profits from garment exports to the United States surpassed India's figures from January to October 2013. During this time period, Bangladesh earned \$4.9 billion in US exports, compared to \$3.2 billion for India.²⁴

Bangladesh garment exports experienced a minor setback in October 2013, in part because of worker unrest and uncertainty in the industry, but successfully bounced back to continue its growth the following month.

Bangladesh Has Large Current Account Surplus

Bangladesh current account recorded a surplus of \$1.38 billion of foreign trade transactions from July to November 2013.²⁵



Within the same time period, Bangladesh's trade deficit also dropped by nearly 35 percent to \$2.246 billion.

The factors contributing to the current account surplus are primarily a considerable rise in exports and a decrease in import costs. This speaks highly of the robustness of Bangladesh's economy, meaning that Bangladesh is more resilient in its ability to cover daily expenditures without depending on foreign loans.

Bangladesh Foreign Exchange Reserves Highest Ever

Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves crossed \$18.12 billion at the end of January 2014, the highest ever possessed by Bangladesh in its

²³ Rafayet Ullah Mirdha, "Exports Soar to Record High," *The Daily Star*, 10 January 2014.

²⁴ "Bangladesh Beats India in Garment Exports," *bdnews24.com*, 19 January 2014.

²⁵ Abdur Rahim Harmachhi, "Huge Balance of Payments Surplus," *bdnews24.com*, 14 January 2014.

independent history and second only to India among SAARC countries.²⁶

The reserves accumulated to this level both as a result of the growth in exports and also the current account surplus.²⁷ The amount of foreign exchange reserves secures Bangladesh's ability to meet the cost of imports, showing great resilience to sustain internal as well as external stress.

Due to the Awami League government's pragmatic economic policies, Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves started showing an upward trend and first crossed \$10 billion in December 2009. It continued to move on an upward trajectory, surpassing \$15 billion in May 2013.

Finance Minister Aims for 6+ Percent GDP Growth

Despite projections by the World Bank and IMF that political unrest would limit Bangladesh's GDP growth, Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith is aiming for a growth rate that will not fall below 6.3 percent.²⁸

Finance Minister Muhith said he would revise the target GDP growth with the current budget, but remained confident that Bangladesh will be able to maintain the average 6.2 percent

of GDP growth it has experienced for the last five years.

"We want to reach a stage where none can hold back our development, and we must be a middle-income country," he said.

World Bank Gives \$410 Million for Urban Development

The World Bank approved \$410 million for Bangladesh to develop municipal governance capabilities and expand urban services for an estimated 3.4 million people through the Municipal Governance and Service Project.²⁹

The money will be used to support 26 government bodies located between Dhaka and the cities of Sylhet, Chittagong, Mymensingh, and Rangpur, as well as three district towns in southern Bangladesh.

The project aims to finance the development of water and sanitation systems, roads and bus terminals, and municipal service centers. The idea is to encourage a culture of responsibility and also boost economic growth.

The World Bank believes the project will help address the challenges caused by rapid urbanization in towns that are not equipped with the adequate administrative infrastructure, financial management, or basic urban services. The project is also expected to employment opportunities for residents and contribute to the reduction of poverty.

²⁶ "Forex Reserve Crosses Record \$18 Billion," *bdnews24.com*, 19 December 2013.

²⁷ "Bangladesh Foreign Exchange Reserves Hit Record High in January," *The Economic Times*, 3 February 2014.

²⁸ "World Bank Projection Won't Come True," *bdnews24.com*, 20 January 2014.

²⁹ "WB Approves 410 mln USD to Improve Bangladesh Municipal Governance, Urban Services," *Xinhua Net News*, 16 January 2014.

Bangladesh ‘Land of Opportunity’ for Startups, Huffington Post Reports

Blogger Anushay Hossain reports that Bangladesh’s value as an international brand is on the rise, as individuals and companies alike are beginning to recognize the growing startup scene in Dhaka.³⁰

According to the article, awareness of Bangladeshi startups was first raised by a film called “Startup Dhaka,” whose creator Mustafiz Khan is a startup investor and enthusiast.



Youtube.com

Indeed, the existing startup community in Bangladesh has been able to sustain businesses with a variety of objectives, ranging from software for companies looking to make the most of digital media for advertising (NewsCred) to an online network for students looking for career planning tools and advice (GradConnect).

Dhaka’s enterprising environment has also attracted foreign start-ups, such as the mobile phone safety company LiveSafe, to consider expanding their operations to Bangladesh.

³⁰ Anushay Hossain, “Branding Bangladesh: India’s Neighbor is Becoming a Major Startup Hub,” *The Huffington Post*, 28 January 2014.

Thus, observers predict the Bangladeshi startup community is poised to continue to grow, offering more innovative employment opportunities for men and women looking to make their mark in the business world.

European Union’s GSP Will Continue

The European Union has declared that the status and facilities of Bangladesh’s goods under its Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) will remain unchanged.³¹

Reiterating the EU’s commitment to remain engaged with Bangladesh in the fields of trade and development, EU Ambassador to Bangladesh William Hanna emphasized that political issues would not affect trade or other forms of cooperation between Bangladesh and the EU.

The European Union is Bangladesh’s single largest trading partner, receiving more than 50 percent of Bangladesh exports in recent years.

Tourists Return to Cox’s Bazaar

The tourism and hospitality industry in Cox’s Bazaar is returning to normal after several months of slow business caused by political unrest.³²

As the January 5th general elections successfully brought political stability in the country, most of the hotels are now reporting a

³¹ Nurul Islam Hasib, “EU GSP to continue,” *bdnews24.com*, 19 January 2014.

³² Sarwar A. Chowdhury and Mohammad Ali Jinnat, “Cox’s Bazar Sees Return of Tourists,” *The Daily Star*, 22 January 2014.

10 to 15 percent increase in bookings. Ferry services between Teknaf and St. Martin's Island resumed on January 16, as tour operating companies have begun to receive more requests for individual and company tours.

The influx of visitors to Cox's Bazaar is expected to remain through the rest of the peak season, with hotel bookings already up by 60 to 70 percent for February and projected to continue rising in the coming months.

Dhaka International Trade Fair 2014 Begins

The 19th annual Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF) began on January 11 to showcase a wide assortment of commodities for local consumers from renowned Bangladeshi and foreign companies.³³



bdnews24.com

The most popular goods on display at the fair include readymade garments; ceramic, porcelain and melamine wares; home appliances; electronic items; handicrafts; and leather goods.

In addition to providing local consumers with the opportunity to purchase the wide variety of products at the fair, the month-long DITF also

facilitates the exchange of knowledge between Bangladeshi manufacturers and foreign manufacturers. Additionally, it encourages foreign buyers to purchase Bangladeshi exports. Last year, Bangladeshi traders received \$20.1 million of orders, and it is expected that export orders in 2014 will surpass \$25.6 million.

Organized by the Export Promotion Bureau and the Ministry of Commerce, this year's fair hosted 471 stalls. 28 stalls are reserved for the use of companies from the participating foreign countries: China, South Korea, Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia, and the United States.

³³ Shahnour Wahid, "Month-Long Extravaganza," *The Daily Star*, 13 January 2014.

Education, Technology, and Innovation

Shahjalal University Students Develop Drone

Students at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) in Sylhet, Bangladesh developed a remote-controlled flying drone model with the help of homegrown technology and equipment.³⁴



Dhaka Tribune

The amazing story began in April 2013 when a talented young student, Syed Rezwanaul Haque, conceived the idea to build a drone with the help of low-cost local technology. He approached Professor Muhammed Zafar Iqbal, the head of the Electrical and Electrical Engineering department at SUST and an inspiring figure in the country for his contributions to scientific innovation. The team began working relentlessly to develop the aircraft. After a number of trial and error tests, they were finally successful in coming up with the current design.

The government has already decided to patronize the young engineers with their innovations and entrepreneurship. The metropolitan police of Dhaka has shown interest

in using the drone for its surveillance activities to curb criminal activities in Dhaka. It is widely believed that the technology may also contribute to the modernization of the Bangladesh army.

The SUST drone can be launched into flight without a runway, and can fly long distances while making very little noise. Although the drone flew for 50 seconds during its exhibition flight on January 29, 2014, it was able to fly for 10 minutes during an earlier test-flight.

Bangladesh Successfully Decodes Buffalo Genome

A team of Bangladeshi scientists successfully decoded the genome of the buffalo, making them the first group to sequence the genome of an animal in the country.³⁵

Researchers from Lal Teer Livestock Ltd. took the gene samples from buffalo in Hatia Island, Bhola and Dinajpur two years ago and decoded with the assistance of the Beijing Genome Institute. The achievement also marked the first time the buffalo's genome had ever been decoded in the world.

A separate group of Bangladeshi scientists sequenced the genome of the Tosha variety of jute in August 2013.

³⁴ "Bangladesh-Made Drone Takes Flight," *Dhaka Tribune*, 29 January 2014.

³⁵ Fajjul Siddikii, "Bangladeshis First to Decode Buffalo Genome," *bdnews24.com*, 23 January 2014.

Government to Distribute Smart Devices to Students

The government initiated a program to distribute electronic ‘smart’ devices to students so that they can download and access their school textbooks.³⁶

The Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (MoICT) reached an agreement with the mobile phone company Symphony to manufacture the devices. The content of the national curriculum will be digitized by another firm called Smart Start.

Secretary of the MoICT Nazrul Islam Khan said the smart devices will not only make it cost-effective for students to access their course materials but also enrich their learning experience. The digital textbooks will also be enhanced with additional multimedia components to make them more attractive to young learners.

Mobile Banking Grows in Popularity

Mobile banking in Bangladesh has exploded in popularity in the last year. The number of mobile banking reached 13.1 million people, a 262 percent increase as compared to the previous year.³⁷

According to the Bangladesh Bank, the value of transactions made through mobile banking increased from \$297.4 million in January 2013 to \$851.3 million in December 2013, a 186

percent increase. 19 of the 28 banks that are part of the government’s financial inclusion program are currently offering mobile banking.

Mobile banking allows customers to access banking services such as bill payments and salary receipts without requiring them to visit a bank in person. The most popular use of mobile banking is cash transfers among individuals.

Private Banks with Bangladesh Origin Take Over e-Payment Business

Local private banks with Bangladesh origins are now the primary vendors conducting e-Payments through point-of-service (POS) terminals, outstripping the foreign banks who once used to dominate the market.³⁸

This represents a significant improvement in the capabilities of local banks, particularly in terms of their competence to acquire and transfer the electronic data of transactions. While Standard Chartered was the most predominant merchant acquirer, City Bank and Dutch-Bangla Bank now lead the business.

³⁶ “Govt. to Launch Smart Device for Reading Textbooks,” *The Financial Express*, 25 January 2014.

³⁷ “Mobile Banking Marks Robust Growth,” *The Daily Star*, 20 January 2014.

³⁸ Sajjadur Rahman, “Local Banks Lead e-Payment,” *The Daily Star*, 24 January 2014.

Climate Change and Environment

Bangladesh Chosen for Green Award

The Ministry of Environment and Forests of Bangladesh has been chosen to receive the Global Green Award for 2014.³⁹



The award, which is given out by the Otherways Management Association of Paris, recognizes excellence in developing the environment in sustainable ways to tackle climate change.

Some of the government's recent environment-friendly actions include the planting of 120 million saplings in 2013 and the founding of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Safari Park in Gazipur. Initiatives like these implemented over the last five years have helped increase the amount of forested areas in Bangladesh to 13.2 percent of the country's total land.

The Global Green Award will be formally presented to Bangladesh at a ceremony to be held in Berlin on March 31.

³⁹ "Bangladesh Selected for Global Green Award 2014," *The New Age*, 1 January 2014.

Culture and Society

Amar Ekushey Book Fair Begins

The month-long Amar Ekushey Book Fair commemorating the Language Movement of 1952 began on February 1.⁴⁰

Traditionally held at the Bangla Academy, the fairgrounds have been extended for the first time to the adjacent Suhrawardy Udyan. Thanks to the expanded premises, the book fair will host 275 publishing houses working from 603 stalls. The book fair will also be attended by other government, non-governmental, and socio-cultural organizations, adding greatly to the festivities.⁴¹

The government will confer upon eleven distinguished individuals the prestigious Bangla Academy Literary Award during the book fair.

13th Annual Dhaka International Film Festival Held

Approximately 150 films were featured at the 13th annual Dhaka International Film Festival (DIFF), which took place from January 10 to January 18.⁴²

Organized by the Rainbow Film Society, the DIFF hosted films from more than 50 countries. The films entered into an awards competition for categories including children's films,

independent films, spiritual films, and films made by female filmmakers.



Dhaka Tribune

Concurrent to the DIFF, a two-day long International Conference on Women in Cinema was also held at Dhaka University.

Dhaka University Professor Named for Padma Bhushan

Professor Emeritus of Dhaka University A.T.M. Anisuzzaman is the first Bangladeshi to be named as a recipient of the Padma Bhushan, the Indian government's third-highest civilian award. Professor Anisuzzaman is being honored for his lifelong contributions to Bengali literature and writing, and was called "one of Bangladesh's foremost intellectuals and thinkers" by the Indian government.⁴³

⁴⁰ "PM to Open Amar Ekushey Book Fair," *Dhaka Tribune*, 1 February 2014.

⁴¹ Muktasree Chakma Sathi, "Amar Ekushey Book Fair Begins Today," *Dhaka Tribune*, 1 February 2014.

⁴² "13th Dhaka International Film Festival Begins Today," *Dhaka Tribune*, 10 January 2014.

⁴³ "Anisuzzaman Named for India's Padma Bhushan," *bdnews24.com*, 26 January 2014.

Embassy News

Embassy to Hold International Mother Language Day Celebrations

The Embassy of Bangladesh will be holding a discussion and cultural show commemorating the Language Martyr's Day and International Mother Language Day on February 22, from 5 PM to 7:30 PM at the Bangabandhu Auditorium of the Embassy of Bangladesh.

In addition to discussing the significance of the day in Bangladesh's history, the cultural show will also feature performances from around the world, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Estonia, India, Japan, Nepal, Paraguay, Russia, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Bangladesh Ambassador Meets Congressman Ed Royce

On January 14, the Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States Akramul Qader held a meeting with Congressman Edward "Ed" Royce, who is currently serving as Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Ambassador Qader briefed Congressman Royce on the state of affairs in Bangladesh, including the general elections, the nature of the unrest caused by the BNP and Jamaat, and the positive changes that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has brought about in the country over the last five years.

H.E. Ambassador Qader also met with Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Nisha Biswal, Congressman Joseph Crowley, and Congresswoman Grace Meng.

