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POLITICAL AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

41st Victory Day celebrated in Bangladesh

On 16th December, the 41st Victory Day was celebrated in Bangladesh with a vow to complete trials of war criminals. People of Bangladesh also vowed to end fundamentalism and militancy to establish a prosperous Bangladesh while placing wreath at the National Memorial in Savar .



This time, the celebration also included conferring honors to 62 foreign friends who contributed in our liberation war, 13 women freedom fighters for joining the battlefield and 10 'Biranganas' who were raped and tortured in the hands of Pakistani soldiers during the nine months of the war.

Thai Prime Minister visits Bangladesh

Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra paid a three-day official visit to Bangladesh from 21 to 22 December 2012. During her visit, she held meetings with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina,

Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni, and business community representatives including FBCCI.

Ms. Shinawatra mentioned that, Thailand wants to double its trade with Bangladesh in both way, export and import by the year 2015. She focused the strong connectivity between the countries by land and sea to be the strongest element to boost bilateral trade. Bangladesh PM, echoing the same, urged Bangkok to allow duty free access of Bangladeshi products to Thai market.



During the meeting between the two premiers, prospects of trade and investment were discussed. The two leaders acknowledged the important role of BIMSTEC in strengthening closer ties in South and Southeast Asia areas and expressed hope that a revitalisation of BIMSTEC would be a powerful instrument for collective growth. After the meeting, Dhaka and Bangkok penned two memorandums of understanding (MoUs), one for establishment of regular bilateral consultations and another for cooperation in the agriculture sector.

Under the existing institutional framework, Bangladesh-Thailand Joint Commission has been assigned the task of making recommendations on specific areas of cooperation with a major focus on connectivity through increased regional cooperation and development of roads and shipping infrastructures.

New areas of cooperation may include infrastructure development, food processing, power generation, exploration and production of oil and gas, tourism and hospitality. The leaders also laid significant importance on bilateral institutional arrangement for effective regulation of recruitment and employment processes.

Two senior US officials visit Bangladesh

Two senior officials of the US Government, Melanne S Verweir, US Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues, and Robert O Blake, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs arrived in Dhaka on 8 December 2012 to attend a four-day South Asia Women's Entrepreneurship symposium. During the visit, Ambassador Blake called on Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni, MP, senior government officials, members of the civil society and representatives of private sector.

During his meeting with Bangladesh Foreign Minister, Ambassador Blake lauded the government's counter-terrorism initiatives and success in women empowerment. He mentioned

that inclusion of Bangladesh as a beneficiary under US President Barack Obama's four global initiatives and the ongoing visits of US high officials to Bangladesh indicate the rising importance of Bangladesh to the US. He, however, expressed shock over the deaths in the fire incident at the Tazreen Fashions and hoped that raising awareness and proper initiatives would help avoid such horrible incidents.

UN adopts PM's Peace Model

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's proposal for People's Empowerment has unanimously been adopted in the 67th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). The proposal was passed as a resolution with support from all 193 member States of the UN at the General Assembly held in New York on December 17, 2012. In addition to this, another resolution, Culture of Peace, proposed by Bangladesh in 2001 was also adopted in the UNGA.

The People's Empowerment and Development Model is aimed at empowering billions of voiceless, marginalized and deprived people worldwide. Terming it as a big achievement, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said, "it is another milestone of the government's diplomatic successes."

30th Anniversary of UNCLOS celebrated in Bangladesh

Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized a seminar

at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in Dhaka to commemorate the 30th anniversary of adoption of UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on 10th December 2012. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was present in the seminar as Chief Guest.

SAARC Charter day Observed

The 28th anniversary of signing of Charter of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), was observed amid new pledges to boost regional cooperation among the member states.

The SAARC Charter was signed during the first summit in Dhaka on December 8, 1985 with the then seven members, "Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka signing it. Afghanistan later became the 8th member of the SAARC in November 2005.

SAARC Meteorological Research Centre (SMRC) and SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC) jointly observed the day commemorating the adoption of SAARC Charter.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Marshal Law stays illegal for Good

Declaration of martial law is an act of high treason against the state, says Bangladesh Supreme Court in its full verdict in the historic case on the 7th amendment to the constitution in its recently published 125-page full text of judgment pronounced on 15 May 2011.

"Any person who declares Martial Law and ousts an elected government or attempts to do so, he and his associates would be liable for high treason against the Republic of Bangladesh," says the judgment.

The SC judgment says the proclamation of martial law, every other proclamation, Chief Martial Law Administrator's (CMLA) orders, regulations, instructions and ordinances made by

during marshal law regime and takeover of the powers of the government as the CMLA and all his subsequent acts, actions and functions till November 10, 1986 are totally unlawful.

In the context of declaring the martial law regime illegal, the apex court has, however, made some exceptions regarding international treaties, contracts and transactions.

Draft law on endowed property okayed

The Endowed Property Management Act-2012, a longstanding demand of the country's Hindu Minority community, has finally been approved by the Cabinet.

The law states that the handover of such properties would be brought under a legal

framework while a central management board would be constituted to look after the properties. The vice chairman of the Hindu Buddha Christian Welfare Trust will be the chairman of the board while the post of a joint secretary-ranked administrator will be created. The latter will also act as the board's member secretary.

The cabinet also okayed the proposal of extending the existing Agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation between Bangladesh and USA for another ten years till February 2023.

Dhaka Ahsania Mission gets ICESCO Literacy Prize

Dhaka Ahsania Mission has received the ICESCO prize for Literacy -2012 for their outstanding contribution in the field of literacy. Morocco-based ISESCO (Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) awarded DAM the prize.

Foreign NGO staffs awarded

Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, on the occasion of 'International Migrants Day', has awarded two officials of an NGO '*Secours Islamique France Company, Choucha*' of Tunisia, Narges Ben Mlouka and Lutfi Jaziri for their contributions to providing shelter to Bangladeshi workers at the borders of Egypt and Tunisia during the political uprising in Libya last year.

The awardees assisted Bangladeshi workers in Libya by giving foods, medicines and shelter.

Nuclear Engineering Dept launched in DU

A new department, Nuclear Engineering has started its journey at Dhaka University to promote nuclear science education and create experts in the field of nuclear technology. Russian Federation agreed to provide necessary assistance for establishment of the department .

Bangladesh Government with the cooperation from Russian Rosatom State Nuclear Energy Corporation opened the very first department of its kind where 26 students have been enrolled in its post-graduation programme.

BRAC Chairperson awarded

Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, founder and chairperson of BRAC, has been awarded the Central European University Open Society Prize 2013 for his outstanding contributions to the principles of open society, and leadership and unwavering commitment to humanitarian aid and development.

Based in Bangladesh, BRAC has been tackling poverty and empowering the poor in 10 other countries of Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. In the span of four decades, it has grown to become the largest development organisation in the world in terms of the scale and diversity of its interventions.

BUSINESS, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

ADB, Bangladesh sign \$ 160 Million deal

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed an agreement with Bangladesh to provide a loan of US\$160 million to help the country develop sustainable urban public transport systems in greater Dhaka. This will establish the first modern mass transit system in Bangladesh pursuing a holistic solution for integrated urban mobility.

The assistance for the “Greater Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport Project” will build a 20km bus rapid transit (BRT) route and construct sidewalks, mixed-traffic lanes, high-capacity drainage system, BRT depot and terminal facilities, and 155 access roads for non-motorised transport.

The total cost of the project is US\$ 255 million. Agence Française de Développement is expected to co-finance the project with US\$ 45 million, while the Global Environment Facility will provide US\$ 4.60 million. The Bangladesh government is also providing \$45.40 million.

Conference held on 'Branding Bangladesh'

A two-day international conference titled 'Positioning Bangladesh: Branding for Business' was held in Dhaka on 5-6 Dec 2012. About 500 experts including economists, business leaders, policymakers, civil society members, diplomats and brand consultants from home and abroad

gathered to help Bangladesh present itself on the global stage.

Organized by Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), Business Initiative Leading Development, KATALYST and Bangladesh Association of Software and Information the conference focused on 12 sectors, including readymade garments, labour, pharmaceuticals and information technology.

More than 30 recommendations came up from seven working sessions of the conference. The speakers suggested, Bangladesh should mitigate the consequences and try to adapt to the new scenario arising out of climate change to brand itself to the world. The speakers also stressed for an integrated branding policy, instead of taking piecemeal steps, as the country is at the crossroads towards higher growth trajectory.

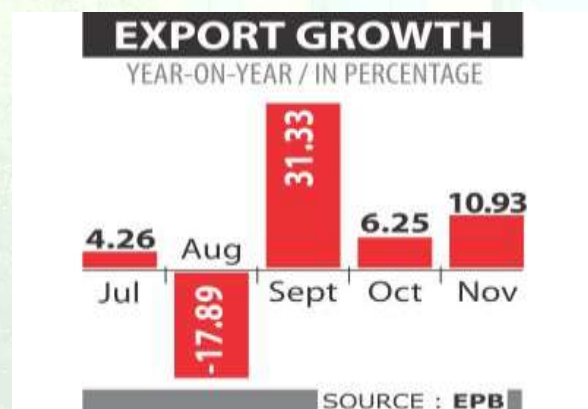
High rice harvest projected by FAO

Rice production may rise 1.2 percent to 51.3 million tonnes in 2012 due to favourable rainfall, distribution of high-yielding seeds and subsidised fertilisers, the Food and Agriculture Organization said. The volume of milled rice is likely to be 34.2 million tonnes for the full year from the three crops -- *aus*, *aman* and *boro*. *Boro*, which accounts for 55% of the annual rice basket may be higher than in the previous *boro* season reaching 18.8million tonnes.

Apart from this, wheat production has also increased making the overall estimated cereal output for 2012 at 54.5 million tonnes, 2 percent higher than in the previous year.

Exports rise 11% in 2012

The country's export earnings increased by about 11 percent year-on-year with \$1.76 billion in November, thanks to growth in shipments of the readymade garments, reveals Export Promotion Bureau (EPB). The new market explorations and product diversification, participation in international fairs and opening new missions abroad-- all these factors have been credited by EPB for the rise.



In November, 2012 overall garment exports stood at \$1.36 billion, up 8.8 percent from the same month a year ago. Knitwear raked in \$653.96 million, while woven garments brought \$710.04 million, according to EPB. EPB registered 25% growth in RMG exports in last three years, however projects that, it may come down 4% in the next calendar year.

Bangladesh rated high by the Guardian

The Guardian has named Bangladesh as one of the emerging countries that could overtake the west by 2050.

Larry Elliott, economics editor of the London-based newspaper, said in a write-up that, 'as the west remains mired in gloom and even the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) start to plateau, attention is turning to this group of countries, many of which not so long ago were rudely dismissed as basket cases'.

As even BRICS plateau, other countries, from Bangladesh to Mexico, are coming up fast and could overtake the west by 2050, he added. The size of these countries, their young and growing population and increasing investment in infrastructure and education are the factors playing main roles for their development.

'India Show' held in Dhaka

A 3-day trade show organized by Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Commerce Ministry was held in Dhaka from 3 to 5 Dec 2012. Around 100 Indian companies participated in the show with their capabilities and strengths with an objective to explore joint venture and cooperation.

The organizers met relevant Bangladesh Ministers to discuss tariff /non-tariff barriers, customs cooperation, visa, finance, etc.

DIGITAL BANGLADESH

Jessore declared first digital district

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared Jessore as the first digital district in Bangladesh through inauguration of automation of public offices of the district.

According to Bangladesh Shangbad Shangstha (BSS), 231 public offices out of 240 in the district have already been automated under a pilot project of National E-service System (NESS). After the inauguration, it would be possible to submit online application through 231 public offices in the district. The remaining nine offices are expected to be automated within a month.

WB signs \$70 millions for IT sector

The Government and the World Bank (WB) signed a \$70 million agreement for an ICT project meant to drive growth, employment and governance.

The project aims to create an estimated 30,000 direct jobs in the information technology and IT-enabled services sectors. The project's total cost will be \$71 million, of which the global lender will provide \$70 million at an interest rate of 0.75 percent to be paid back in 40 years, including a grace period of 10 years.

Ten thousand non-computer science graduates will be trained as software developers and 20,000 more will be trained in computer language, customer services and other trainings on computer literacy, according to the External Resources Division (ERD) officials.

Post Office launches e-pay

Bangladesh Post Office, in its bid to rejuvenate its business, has yesterday launched trial run of the long-awaited mobile banking service in three hubs (GPO, Sadarghat & Banani) in the capital.

Financed by Bangla Phone, the new service touted Post e-Pay would provide a range of financial services, including money transfer, bill payments, cash deposits and withdrawals. The users would be able to check their transaction information and balance too.

The customers have to register with their photo IDs at particular post offices and must have internet enabled mobile phone to use such service. Post office will charge Tk. 3 for each transaction and Tk. 5 for each withdrawal.

The project is expected to be implemented in seven divisional headquarters soon. In phases, around 10,000 post offices would have the service and another 100,000 agents would be employed.

Central Bank opens gateway to e-commerce

Bangladesh Bank recently launched National Payment Switch, a common platform for the country's commercial banks for electronic payments.

Once all banks in Bangladesh join the NPS, a customer using a credit or debit card of any bank will be able to draw cash from any ATM and POS (point of sales) in the country. And transaction costs will significantly go down as the transactions will be routed through the NPS instead of Visa, Master or Amex card networks abroad. Moreover, purchase and sale can be done with cards through the internet and web portals within the country.

The central bank has set up the NPS at a cost of \$5 million (around Tk 40 crore) funded by the World Bank. It took more than three years to install the system. Though many Asian and African countries have the system in place for long, Bangladesh took quite a while to set up a common electronic payment platform to help

banks and their clients make transactions in an easy and cost effective way.

Digital land registration begins

Government of Bangladesh has introduced digital land registration system to reduce people's sufferings. A project for modernisation and digitisation of the land registration system has been inaugurated by the Law Minister at the Registration Complex in Tejgaon, Dhaka.

The 1st phase of the project will be implemented in sadar record rooms and sadar sub-registrar's offices of Dhaka, Comilla and Jessore districts, and Uttara and Tejgaon sub-registrar's offices of Dhaka district.

An agreement has been signed by the Government in this regard with a joint venture company comprising information technology firms DataSoft Systems Bangladesh Ltd, Business Automation Ltd and Info Consult Ltd to implement the project.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Eco-friendly RMG sector can save \$150 m in a year

Bangladesh's garment industry can save at least \$150 million a year by introducing an environment friendly production method,

according to a study of the International Finance Corporation.

The study was released at a seminar on 'environment friendly and resource efficient production: the context of textile and clothing

industry' organized by Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) at the Westin Hotel, Dhaka.



The study was conducted by the SouthAsia Enterprise Development Facility (SEDF) on behalf of the IFC.

The keynote speaker said, cleaner production is needed for sustainable development. So the apparel makers should practise an environment friendly production method as part of their daily operation.

Climate model village in Sundarbans

International banking organization HSBC has extended support for the a programme for developing a remote village in the Sundarbans, as a climate model village. The CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) initiative of the MRDI (Management and Resources Development Initiative) is aimed at improving the health and socio-economic

conditions of the village people in a sustainable approach.

The programme will contribute to addressing the threat of destruction of the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest of the world. Under this intervention, eco-friendly ovens were distributed among all 360 families of the village.

Three ponds will be re-excavated and filtering system will be installed in each pond to ensure pure drinking water for the dwellers there, who are at severe health risk due to acute crisis of safe water source. Moreover, skills training on sewing and stitching will be organized for the interested women of the village that will open up better livelihood options for them.

The initiative will reduce health risk, improve living standard of people of the village and prevent environmental pollution which will ultimately save the Sundarbans, said Rokia Afzal Rahman, former adviser to a caretaker government, while addressing the oven distribution function.

Sayedabad Water treatment plant inaugurated

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated Sayedabad Water Treatment Plant Phase-2 at the plant premises. With the plant's inauguration, the WASA supply line will have an additional 22.50 crore litres of safe drinking water every day.



Phase-2 of the project was implemented at the cost of Tk 1,140 crore with DANIDA of Denmark contributing 68 percent of the total cost, excluding the cost of land.

Svend Olling, the Danish Ambassador to Bangladesh announced that his government would provide US\$ 100 million for the project's 3rd phase.

Sheikh Hasina mentioned that the government plans to set up water treatment plants at Josholdia near Mawa Ghat to use water from the Padma while at Khilkhet near the Meghna to reduce dependency on groundwater.

ART & CULTURE

15th Asian Art Biennale held in Dhaka

The 15th Asian Art Biennale held at the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA) in Dhaka. The festival is composed of art exhibitions, seminars and discussions.



Three local artists including Kazi alahuddin Ahmed, Zihan Karim and Yasmin Jahan Nupur have won awards at the biennale.

BSA has been organizing the biennale since 1981. Apart from Bangladesh, 34 countries have taken part with 800 artworks at the event. Among the participating countries are: Bahrain, Brunei, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, South and North Korea, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Syria, Thailand, Philippines, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan.

About 800 artworks of 538 artists were on display at the exhibition. The mediums include: paintings, etchings, sculptures, installations and video art. Other highlights of the month-long biennale included 2-day long (2-3 Dec 2012) seminar titled, “Cultural Crosspollination and Regional Perspectives”.

Shaheed Munir Chowdhury Award conferred

Veteran director Mamunur Rashid received this year's Shaheed Munier Chowdhury Award. On the other hand, young director and teacher Sudip Chakrobarthy received the Mohammad Zakaria Memorial award. Both awards were conferred by the troupe, Theatre (Bailey Road), on November 29 at the Experimental Theatre Hall, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

Secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mohamed Mijarul Quayes, was the chief guest at the programme. International Theatre Institute Worldwide President and Director (organization) of the troupe, Ramendu Majumdar, among others, spoke at the event.



The ceremony also marked the 87th birth anniversary of Shaheed Munier Chowdhury, one of the pioneering theatre personalities of the country.

EMBASSY NEWS

Victory Day Celebrated

The Embassy of Bangladesh in Washington, DC celebrated the historic Victory Day with due solemnity and enthusiasm. The celebration included flag hoisting at the Embassy premises, discussion and cultural soiree.

The day began with flag hoisting ceremony at the embassy premises. Mr. Muhammad Abdul Muhith, Deputy Chief of Mission hoisted the national flag amidst the national anthem at the background. The ceremony was followed by one minute silence, a special prayer and recitation of Victory Day messages from the Hon'ble President, Hon'ble Prime Minister and Hon'ble Foreign Minister.

The discussion and cultural event were held at the Bangabandhu Auditorium of the Embassy in the evening. Bangladesh Ambassador to the USA Mr. Akramul Qader in his address paid tribute to the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, freedom fighters and the Bangladeshi women who had to sacrifice immensely for the nation's victory against Pakistani invading forces in 1971. He also paid tribute to Bangladesh's foreign friends including those from the USA who supported Bangladesh's cause and called for an end to Pakistan military's atrocities there.

Noting the remarkable success Bangladesh has made since independence and potential of becoming a middle income country by 2021, a goal set by Hon'ble PM Sheikh Hasina Ambassador Qader suggested that expatriate Bangladeshis should come forward with innovative ideas for expanding Bangladesh's business with rest of the world.



Mr. Sarkar Kabiruddin a long time journalist with the Voice of America, Mr. Thomas Dine, Mrs. Dine reminisced their association with Bangladesh's independence war and particularly, how the developments in 1971 in the then East Pakistan eventually made global news headlines..

After the discussion, a cultural programme was held. Embassy officials, their family members, singers and dancers from the Bangladesh community living in the USA took part in the cultural event. The Guests that included senior US officials, foreign ambassadors and representatives from various missions in Washington DC were served with authentic Bangladeshi foods.

PHOTO GALLERY



Victory Day 2012

News source:

Different daily and weekly newspapers published from Bangladesh