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POLITICAL AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Prime Minister visits Viet Nam and Laos

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paid two consecutive visits to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and Lao People's Democratic Republic from 2 to 7 November 2012.



The visit to Viet Nam was tended to hold bilateral talks with a view to fostering the existing cooperation mechanism such as formation of a Joint Commission. The foreign ministries of the two countries would now initiate talks and organize the political-level consultation next year to cement the bilateral relations and exchange views on regional and international issues of common concern.

At the official talk held between the delegations led by respective premiers, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Tan Dung in Hanoi, both countries agreed to further strengthen bilateral relations in the fields of agriculture, trade, economics, politics, security and defence.

Sheikh Hasina said "as the economies of the two countries are based on agriculture, we can work together for food production and processing to ensure food security in both nations." She

invited the Vietnamese investors, distinguished persons and media people to visit Bangladesh and see its overall progress in the bid to become a regional economic hub. The Vietnamese premier said, "we agreed to create a favourable atmosphere for the companies of the two countries in business and investment areas like consumer goods production, fishery processing and telecommunications".

Later, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina traveled to Laos to join the 9th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit of Heads of State and Government on November 4-7, 2012. While addressing a lunch hosted by the Laotian Prime Minister Thongsing Thammavong, Sheikh Hasina observed that Laos may get benefit from Bangladesh's connectivity with India, Nepal, Bhutan and China, and the combined market of over three billion people by utilizing its strategic location connecting South Asia and Southeast Asia with sea, air and road links.

Hasina warmly invited Laotian entrepreneurs to come and consider possibilities of investment in Bangladesh and also offered that Laos could import quality pharmaceuticals now being exported to 93 countries, ceramics and porcelain now going to 61 destinations in Europe, Americas, Africa and Asia, readymade garments, textiles, leather and footwear.

The Prime Minister sought Laotian support for Bangladesh's entry into the Mekong-Ganges Cooperation Initiative, the East-West Economic Corridor, and in becoming an ASEAN Dialogue Partner.

Belarusian Prime Minister visits Bangladesh

The Prime Minister of Belarus Mikhail Myasnikovich paid a three-day official visit to Bangladesh from 11-14 Nov 2012.

During the visit, Dhaka and Minsk signed seven agreements and five memoranda of understanding (MOU). The agreements pertain mainly to promotion and protection of investment and cooperation on science, technology and education. The MOUs relate to cooperation in the legal sphere, agro-industrial manufacturing, aquaculture and more.

Under these, there is opportunity for Bangladesh to export clothing, jute yarn, tobacco, fish and other marine products, as well as to benefit from Belarusian expertise in the area of milk production and dairy industry. Following a visit to Square Pharmaceuticals, one of the fastest growing private sector pharmaceutical manufacturing factories in the developing world, Belarus has also agreed to import pharmaceuticals and technological expertise from the company.

The two countries consented to boost cooperation in education by maintaining direct links between educational institutions. Belarus offered to establish a multidisciplinary faculty of the highest quality at a university in Bangladesh for training experts and specialists on various basic, applied and advanced disciplines of science and technology. Belarus also offered collaboration in agro and industrial manufacturing and science-based initiatives.

Regarding cooperation in the international arena, the two premiers reaffirmed their faith in the UN charter and confirmed their willingness towards continued cooperation in the UN and other international organizations.

Bangladesh Joins ASEM

Bangladesh formally joined the 52-nation Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) devoted to building up cooperation between Asia and Europe on political, economic and social issues along with two other nations, Norway and Switzerland in an enlargement ceremony that took place on 5 November 2012 in Laos.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who attended the enlargement function with other heads of state and government of 52 countries expressed her profound delight saying "you have welcomed us in your midst as a partner, and we promise to contribute fully to the ASEM process." Hasina hoped the Asian neighbourhood would be able to work with the European friends in seeking convergence on various global as well as regional challenges and opportunities. Premiers from Australia, Norway, Switzerland, Pakistan, and European Commission spoke on the occasion.

Other speakers at the ceremony said the ASEM process has made significant contribution to the promotion of mutual understanding, peace, stability, development and prosperity of Asia and Europe. Despite the challenges like climate change, economic and financial crisis, high prices of food and energy, natural disasters, outbreak of infectious diseases, ASEM remains

relevant and continues to be an important forum for the partners to share their thoughts, exchange views and explore ways and means in promoting better understanding between Asia and Europe, they observed.

Hon. Foreign Minister visits Moscow and Djibuti

Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni, MP paid an official visit to Moscow from 22 to 25 November 2012. Dr. Dipu Moni and her Russian counterpart Sergey V Lavrov met at an extensive bilateral discussion followed by a joint press briefing and luncheon. They reviewed the whole gamut of bilateral relations between the two countries including economic, energy and power, trade, cultural, educational and defense cooperation. The two Ministers especially discussed the cooperation in the construction of Nuclear Power Plant in Bangladesh, reviewed status of a number of proposed agreements and MOUs, duty free and quota free access for Bangladesh products, to the Russian market as well as the Customs Union (comprising of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan), exchange of diplomatic properties etc.

Dr. Dipu Moni requested for duty-free and quota-free access of Bangladeshi RMGs to the Russian market as well as expansion of import of sea food from Bangladesh.

The Russian Foreign Minister while assuring his cooperation on these issues also expressed the willingness to cooperate with Bangladesh in the modernization of power generation sector as well as of installation of a Telecom Space Satellite by Bangladesh.

The two leaders also discussed the regional and international issues of mutual concern. The Russian Foreign Minister assured his country's support for Bangladesh's bid for the observer of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). He also appreciated the revitalizing role of the present Government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the regional cooperation in South Asia.

Earlier, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni visited Djibouti to attend the 39th session of Organization of the Islamic Cooperation's Council of Foreign Ministers held there from 15 to 17 November 2012. The conference in Djibouti held under the theme, "Session of Solidarity for Sustainable Development" discussed the situation in Syria and how to stop the bloodshed there and address the humanitarian situation in Syria and neighbouring countries.

A range of other political, economic, cultural and humanitarian issues, among other issues of concern to the Muslim world, was also discussed by the council.

Bangladesh elected IOM chair

Bangladesh has been elected the chair of International Organization for Migration (IOM) unanimously for a period of one year. Bangladesh's Permanent Representative and Ambassador to the United Nations Offices in Geneva Md Abdul Hannan, has assumed the post of the chair after the election.

Earlier, Bangladesh was the first vice-chair of the organization in 2011.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Bangladesh gets women in driving seat

BRAC, the world's largest NGO based in Bangladesh has set up driving schools to train women for professional driving. About 600 under privileged women from rural areas of the country are now receiving training at BRAC School of driving, 21 of them have already got floated into the job market with certificates. Each driving school graduate will earn at least 10,000 taka (\$122) a month if they get a job as a government or private driver -- three times the salary of a garment worker.

The organizers of the Training Programme believe that the course could be one small step towards female drivers becoming a common sight in Bangladesh as women seek to become wage-earners.

Only a few women work as drivers in Bangladesh-- state figures show the country has only 265 professional women against an estimated 2.4 million males.

According to Ayubur Rahman Khan, head of state-run Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), "Female drivers are less aggressive. Their involvement in fatal accidents is 50 percent less than male drivers, and road rage is comparatively less... We thought the best way to cut accidents will be to have more women drivers,"

Mentionable, according to the national Accident Research Institute (ARI), the accident rate in Bangladesh is at least 50 times higher than Western Europe and North America, based on

the number of fatalities per 10,000 registered vehicles. "

BRAC to set up 400 boat schools

In association with a foreign initiative, BRAC will build 400 boat schools for disadvantaged children in the remote flood plains of Bangladesh by 2014 with funds from EAC (Educate A Child), an initiative, recently launched by Sheikha Moza bint Nasser Al-Missned, the lady wife of the Emir of Qatar.

EAC will also provide funds for operation of BRAC's 2,000 slum schools in urban areas. The announcement came at the World Innovation Summit on Education held in Doha, Qatar, on November 13-15, says a press release.

On October 22, Sheikha Moza inaugurated a BRAC boat school in Sunamganj and said the "floating school" was an innovative solution in the country's marshlands where flood and poverty made normal schooling almost impossible.

Islami Arabic University Act approved

Cabinet approved draft law to establish Islami Arabic University to bring 1500 Kamil and Fazil madrasas under single university affiliation. The draft was prepared by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in line with the new education policy of the Government.

BUSINESS, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

ADB lends billions in power, stock and food

Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved \$1 billion as loans to give a boost to Bangladesh's power supply system and to develop the country's capital market. The lender will give \$700 million for the power supply system, which will reduce outages and power shortfall and \$300 million loan under the Second Capital Market Development Programme.

According to the statement of ADB, some 450,000 households will receive new power connections through the multitranches facility's financing of an expansion and upgrade of generation, transmission and distribution facilities. Carbon emissions will also be reduced by almost 2.5 million tonnes per year.

Besides this, ADB also signed a deal with *Pran Group*, a leading food and Agribusiness Company in Bangladesh, to lend \$25.1 million to build three food manufacturing plants.

The plants, to be set up under Sylvan Agriculture Ltd, will produce liquid glucose, frozen food processing and fortified flour, and are scheduled to be completed by 2015. The three plants will cost \$35.8 million to build, with Pran's controlling shareholders providing the remaining \$10.7 million.

The estimated annual production capacity from the plants will be: 45,000 tons of liquid glucose, 90,000 tons of flour and 180 million units of flour-based frozen foods. The annual sales are expected to exceed \$50 million by 2016.

The plants will directly employ around 1,000 workers, and provide indirect employment for about 50,000 farmers under a contract farming model; at least 30 percent of the workforce will be female.

EU revises its GSP

The European Union yesterday issued its revised import preference scheme -- generalised system of preferences (GSP) -- for developing countries most in need.

The new scheme will be effective from January 1, 2014, according to a statement of the European Union. Following an agreement with the Council and European Parliament, yesterday's publication contains the specific tariff preferences granted under the GSP in the form of reduced or zero tariff rates and the final criteria for which developing countries will benefit. "This now allows us to tailor our pro-development trade scheme to give the countries still lagging behind some additional breathing space and support," said EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht.

Currently 176 developing countries and territories have preferential access to the EU. The new scheme will be focused in fewer beneficiaries to ensure more impact on countries most in need. Eighty-nine countries will enjoy the preference from January 1, 2014.

Under the new scheme, 49 least developed countries, including Bangladesh, and 40 low and lower middle income countries, including India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, will have preferential

access to the EU. The LDCs will continue to enjoy, without any change, the open-ended *Everything But Arms (EBA)* scheme. The LDCs will also continue to benefit from the recently amended and more favourable GSP Rules of Origin.

It may be mentioned here that 95 percent of Bangladesh's exports to EU receive duty free access under GSP and the exports to EU reached a record 8.5 billion euro in 2011, compared to 6.6 billion euro in 2010.

New Business leaders elected

Kazi Akramuddin Ahamed. Chairman of Standard Bank was unanimously elected as the president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Apex

organization of businessman and exporters in Bangladesh, after he led his panel to a landslide victory in the poll held on 25 November 2012. He will serve as President of FBCCI for a 02 years term.

In another forum, Ms. Rokia Afzal Rahman has been elected president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) Dhaka. A leading woman entrepreneur of the country and a former adviser to the caretaker government, Rokia was elected president of the MCCI at the first meeting of the chamber's new committee on 19 November 2012. Apart from heading number of companies Rokia is also involved in social organizations like Bangladesh Federation of Women Entrepreneurs, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, Manusher Jonno Foundation, and Bangladesh Freedom Foundation.

DIGITAL BANGLADESH

BBS moves for digitalization

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has initiated a move to digitalize its data collection system in preparing consumer price index (CPI). Under the new system, the local level data collectors will send their data through an electronic device called "personal data assistant (PDA) tablet" from the fields during their survey works instead of present manual system.

The data will instantly reach at the central server at the BBS headquarters where data will automatically show the time, date and place of

sending. The system will be operated using the global positioning system (GPS), which the mobile phones operators use.

The BBS officials said that under the PDA system, the whole data collection activities would be easily monitored. He also informed that a private firm -Amader Cloud-is engaged to operate the PDA system. Already a team comprising the officials of the private firm, officials of the BBS field level offices and also officials from BBS headquarters has been working in Kurigram and Patuakhali district on the PDA pilot project.

First bilingual classified website launched

Bikroy.com, a Sweden-based website for buying and selling second-hand products, was formally launched last month though it started its journey in June this year.

Nils Hammar, CEO of Bikroy.com in an interview said Bangladesh is a promising market with more than 150 Million people. The boom in internet users in Bangladesh, steady economic growth made them interested to come to Bangladesh.

He said Bikroy offers the seller a 100% free platform for posting ads and it ensures best offer for selling their second-hand items. On the other hand, for the buyer it ensures wide range of deals on popular second-hand items (like mobile phones, computers, cars, houses etc.).



Bikroy.com is an online market place, so if you are a buyer then you can just visit our web page bikroy.com and search by category, area or even brand you are looking for, he added. For posting ad, you just need a valid email ID and need to fill up the product information. You do not need to become a member.

Bikroy currently has more than 50,000 ads in the site posted by different users.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Germany to give Tk. 111cr for climate change battle

Germany, a key development partner of Bangladesh, will provide 10.98 million euros or Tk. 111.37 crore to the government to help the country fight the impacts of climate change. The two Countries have signed an agreement in this regard. The fund for the "Climate Change Adaptation through Flood Protection Programme" will be disbursed through KfW, the German Development Bank, and will be implemented by the Local Government Engineering Department of Bangladesh between 2012 and 2017.

The project aims at building disaster resilient infrastructures sustainable in the face of adverse impacts of climate change. It aims to ensure improved road connectivity, improved market services and enhanced climate change adaptation capacity in three coastal districts: Patuakhali, Barguna and Bhola.

Strict Regulations for Ship-breaking industry

Bangladesh is formulating new legislation to prevent ships carrying toxic material to enter into the country. Following directives from High Court Division given in a writ petition filed in

2009 by Bangladesh Environment Lawyers' Associations (BELA), Ship Breaking and Ship Recycling Rules are now underway. The Rules have been formulated drawing on six international laws on this subject and HC directives. Mentionable, as there was no law in place that made it mandatory for the industry to obtain environmental clearance from the responsible department, Bangladesh had effectively become the dumping ground for some of the world's most toxic and dangerous derelict ships.

The new rules allows for import of ships for dismantling purposes only on the condition that they are decontaminated as per HC verdict in 2009.

ART & CULTURE

Biggest ever classical music festival held

The Bengal ITC-SRA Classical Music Festival 2012, the biggest ever classical music festival, was held in Dhaka from 29 to 30 November 2012 that brought together the giants of Indian classical music and dances in one stage. The festival was jointly organized by Bengal Foundation and the ITC-Sangeet Research Academy of Kolkata to promote, nurture and celebrate the shared legacy of classical music in Bangladesh.

Participated by a total of 100 artistes and maestros, the entire festival was dedicated to the memory of the legendary Ustad Alauddin Khan while two days of the festival were dedicated to Sangeetsadhak Waheedul Haque and Sarod Maestro Ustad Vilayat Khan respectively.

China keen to invest in renewable energy

A delegation from China's Yunnan provincial energy administration has shown interest to invest in renewable energy sector of Bangladesh. The expert team on renewable energy led by Xie Jin Shu, consultant for the division of coordination and scientific and technological equipment of Yunnan provincial energy administration met FBCCI president and number of dignitaries in this regard.

"We visited Bangladesh to realise the potential of the country's renewable energy sector," said Xie Jin Shu.



[Ustab Rashid Khan]

Ustad Ali Ahmed Hussain, along with Pandit Samar Saha on Tabla, was the first maestro on stage, mesmerising the audience with the magic of his Shehnai. The other artistes of the night were Omkar Dadarkar (vocal), Ustad Shahadat Hossain (Sarod), Vidushi Sujata Mohapatra (Odissi), Waseem Ahmed Khan (vocal), Ustad

Shahid Parvez (Vocal), Pandit Uday Bhawalkar (vocal), Pandit Tejendra N Majumdar (Sarod) and Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty (vocal), Rajrupa Chowdhury (Sarod), Deboshree Bhattacharjee (vocal), Yashwant Vaishnav (Tabla), Adnan Khan (Sitar), Sandip Bhattacharjee (vocal), Kaushiki Desikan (vocal), Ustad Mashkoo Ali Khan (vocal), Pandit Buddhadev Dasgupta (Sarod), Ustad Rashid Khan (Vocal) and Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma (Santoor).

Screening of 'Ghetu Putro Kamola' at Golden Globe

A special screening of Humayun Ahmed's last film "Ghetu Putro Kamola" was held on 10 November 2012 at the Beverly Hills Wilshire Auditorium in Los Angeles as official entry of Bangladesh to the Golden Globe Awards. This is the first Bangladeshi production to be part of the prestigious ceremony, which along with the Academy Awards culminates the US film industry's awards season.



The film provides a detailed account of a strange practice of hiring pleasure boys by land-lords during the monsoon season in the lowlands of Bangladesh. Highlighting a cultural tradition that is now extinct -- "Ghetu Gaan", the film

depicts the joys and sorrows of the people of this lowland that becomes isolated during the monsoon. While bringing out the dark practices of child abuse, it essentially sketches the landscape and lifestyle of a certain community at a certain period of time.

'Hay Festival' held in Dhaka

Hay Festival Dhaka was held for the second time in the capital's Bangla Academy from November 15 to 17, providing a number of renowned foreign and local authors and artists the opportunity to hold dialogues.

This year, the star attraction of the literary feast was Vikram Seth's much acclaimed novel, *A Suitable Boy*. Philip Hensher, Syed Shamsul Haq, Nandita Das, Kamila Shamsie, Basharat Peer, Zafar Iqbal, Gillian Clarke, Kaiser Haq, Mohammad Hanif, Farah Ghuznavi, Shehan Karunatilaka, Selina Hossain, Mahmud Rahman, Anisul Hoque and Tahmima Anam took part in various sessions.

Rooted in the Welsh town of Hay-on-Wye, Hay Festival is one of the best known and most loved literary events held worldwide where writers, poets, critics and artists from different continents come together for free exchange of ideas and expressions.

Wasfia sets off for Antarctica

Bangladeshi adventuress Wasfia Nazreen, also the second Bangladeshi woman to climb Mount Everest earlier this year will continue on her quest to conquer the Seven Summits with an expedition to climb Mount Vinson in Antarctica. BRAC will finance the mission of Wasfia.

Wasfia will first spend three weeks to get trained and acclimatised with Patrick Morrow, the first person to have finished seven summits, in the winter wilderness of Canada. Following her training, she will then set foot on Antarctica via the Chilean territory. If everything goes

according to plan, she is set to summit Vinson in early-mid January 2013. Mount Vinson will be Wasfia's fourth expedition of the series. She has previously successfully summited Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa, Mount Aconcagua in South America and Mount Everest in Asia.

EMBASSY NEWS

Armed Forces day Observed

On 26 November 2012, The Embassy of Bangladesh in Washington DC observed the Armed Forces Day with due solemnity and enthusiasm.

To commemorate the glorious day of 21 November 1971 when the Bangladeshi Army, Navy, Air force were combined and launched their attack against the Pakistani forces, the Embassy hosted a Reception at the Bangabandhu Auditorium. A good number of guests including Defense attachés from other embassies, members of the diplomatic corps, US dignitaries including high officials from the Pentagon and State Department, representatives from media, members of the Bangladesh Community and officers of the Mission attended the Reception.

Bangladesh Ambassador to the USA HE Akramul Qader and Defence Attaché Brig. Gen. Mohammad Abdul Moeen, ndc, psc welcomed the guests.

Ambassador Akramul Qader, in his welcome remarks, offered rich tribute to the martyrs' including the members of Armed Forces who had made supreme sacrifices for the independence of the country. The Ambassador also paid deep respect to the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for his contribution to build a modern Armed Force for the newly independent country. He recognized their contributions particularly in field of disaster management, infrastructure development and preparation of computerized national ID cards in the country. Ambassador Qader recalled the pioneering role of the Bangladesh Armed Forces under the UN Peace-keeping Missions which brightened the image of Bangladesh abroad.

Earlier the Defense Attaché' gave a brief resume on the role of the Bangladesh Armed Forces since inception. On the sideline of the Reception, there was a video presentation on the glorious role of the Bangladesh Armed Forces both in nation building and in peace-keeping around the world.

PHOTO GALLERY



Armed Forces Day 2012

News source:

Different daily and weekly newspapers published from Bangladesh