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On March 26, 2009 Bangladesh observed the 38th anniversary of its independence. 38 years ago, this day, the valiant sons of the soil stood up and proclaimed Bangladesh's independence. The declaration of independence was followed by the nine month long epic war weaved in stories of sacrifice and heroism. The final victory came on December 16, 1971 under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh.

People of Bangladesh – at home and abroad – observed the day and paid rich tribute to the fallen heroes of the Liberation War. In Dhaka, the day’s program began with a 31-gun salute at Tejgaon old airport. At dawn, Honorable President Zillur Rahman, Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Honorable Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia placed floral wreaths at Jatiyo Smriti Soudha (the National Mausoleum) at Savar. From early morning thousands of people from all walks of life streamed at the Smriti Soudha. The Smriti Soudha was built at Savar in memory of the freedom fighters who had made supreme sacrifice for the independence of Bangladesh. Outside Dhaka various organizations put up programs including musical soiree and painting competitions. Bangladesh Embassies abroad also observed the Day in a befitting manner.

On this occasion, the Honorable President, Honorable Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, in separate messages, called upon Bangladeshis at home and abroad to unite for making a prosperous, peaceful and modern Bangladesh.

The Independence Day Award ceremony was also held on this day. Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was present as the chief guest to honor the recipients of the awards.

Reception hosted at Bangladesh Embassy in Washington DC on the Independence and National Day

In celebration of the Independence and National Day of Bangladesh, the Embassy Bangladesh in Washington, DC hosted a Reception at the Embassy premises in the evening of 26 March 2009. US Government high officials, members of the diplomatic corps, politicians, Congressional staff members, representatives from leading think- tanks, academia, business leaders, media personalities and the members of the Bangladeshi American community attended the Reception.

Ambassador M. Humayun Kabir, himself a valiant freedom fighter, and his wife Mrs. Rokeya Kabir welcomed the guests. The guests were served with traditional Bangladeshi cuisine. A colorful video display on Bangladesh's independence and development activities was also screened during the event.
Earlier in the morning, Ambassador Kabir ceremonially hoisted Bangladesh’s national flag at the Embassy premises. Messages from the Honorable President, Honorable Prime Minister, Honorable Foreign Minister and Honorable State Minister for Foreign Affairs were also read out. A special monajat was offered seeking salvation of the departed souls of the martyrs of 1971, and also for the peace, progress and continued prosperity of the country. To mark the occasion the Embassy has also published a souvenir.

**Information Technology is a top priority for Bangladesh: Prime Minister.**

The Government of Bangladesh will introduce compulsory curriculum on Information Technology (IT) at Secondary School level by 2013. The same will be replicated at the primary school level by 2021. This was announced by the Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the inaugural ceremony of Bangladesh Computer Samity (BCS) Digital Expo-2009 at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre on 25 March, 2009 in Dhaka. The Prime Minister said that her government would do whatever was necessary to create 10,000 information technology (IT) programmers every year.

Honorable Prime Minister also said that the present government was keen to introduce e-governance to ensure transparency in governance. In this connection, she said that the government was now planning to make all its procurement through 'e-tender.' The honorable Prime Minister informed the audience that her government was working to connect the country with another submarine cable soon. "We are very flexible about giving facilities to the private sector," she said urging the representatives from the sector to give the government suggestions for formulating polices to have a 'Digital Bangladesh' by 2021.

**Bangladesh Brand Forum attempts to defy the global meltdown**

Whilst the world may be reeling from the global financial crisis and the reputation of many companies received a battering, Bangladesh corporate world is attempting to take an optimistic leap forward. The Bangladesh Brand Forum has taken a bold step in telling its corporate leaders and marketers to focus on developing their brands.

Bangladesh Brand Forum (BBF) 2009 was held on 28 and 29 March 2009 at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel under the theme- Surviving Hyper Competition. Seven International speakers provided inspiration to Bangladeshi leaders on how to build strong emotional connections with customers.

Participants of the programme also focused on a collective dream, respect to local culture, corporate ethics and values in brand-building. An emphasis was also put
on financial transparency of corporate houses and their investment in enhancing the purchasing power of the low-income group. At the seminar at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel, the discussants also recalled that “Our strength is entrepreneurship even in the midst of various problems, hopelessness,”

Publisher and Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam, Munawar Misbah Moin, director of Rahimafrooz Group, Grameenphone Communications Director Rubaba Dowla, Kazi & Kazi Tea Estates Chief Executive Officer Kazi Anis Ahmed were among the panelists. Chief Adviser of Bangladesh Brand Forum Prof Syed Ferhat Anwar moderated the discussion.

45 Women Members of Parliament Sworn in

The newly elected 45 women members of parliament from the reserved seats were sworn in on 29 March 2009 at the National Parliament building in Dhaka. Honorable Speaker of the Parliament Mr. M. Abdul Hamid administered the oath.

On 19 March 2009 the Election Commission (EC) of Bangladesh announced the names of 45 new members of parliament (MPs) for reserved women's seats. An EC official said the women lawmakers, nominated by the three major parties, had been declared 'elected uncontested' as parties nominated just 45 candidates within the deadline set for withdrawal of nominations.

The ruling Bangladesh Awami League got 36 seats, Bangladesh Nationalist Party 5 and Jatiya Party 4 in accordance with quotas determined on the basis of seats won by their respective parties in the parliamentary elections held in December 2008.

With the reserved 45 women seats the total member of the current Bangladesh Jatiyo Sangsad members is 345 including the 300 elected MPs elected in the election held on 29 December 2008.

Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recently has said that reserved seats for women would be increased up to 100 in the next parliament and direct election would be held for the seat thus reserved for women. This, if implemented, will elevate Bangladesh’s signature issue of women empowerment to a new height.

89th Birth Anniversary of the Father of the Nation and the National Children’s Day 2009 observed at Bangladesh Embassy

As per government instruction, the 89th birth anniversary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was duly observed at Bangladesh Embassy in Washington DC on 17 March 2009. On the occasion, the Embassy chalked out an elaborate program. A discussion meeting chaired by Ambassador Mr. M. Humayun Kabir was held at the Auditorium of the Embassy. Among others, Professor Khalid Hasan, Mr. Mizanur Rahman Majumder, Mr. Alamgir, Mr. Alauddin, Dr. Shahjahan Mahmud, Mr. Mahmudun Nabi Baki spoke on the occasion. The speakers highlighted Bangabandhu’s contribution in the independence of Bangladesh. They called upon all Bangladeshis to work for the fulfillment of the dream of the Father of the Nation’s for a ‘Golden Bengal’- the Bengal of prosperity. They also emphasized on the
need to educate Bangladesh’s younger generation on the life and works of Bangabandhu.

In his speech, Ambassador Mr. M. Humayun Kabir recalled the epic role played by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Bangladesh’s emergence as an independent country. He said that the newly elected democratic government of Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has taken various initiatives to fulfill the dreams of the Father of the Nation. Ambassador Kabir urged the expatriate Bangladeshis to work together for the establishment of a modern Bangladesh. A documentary on the life and works of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was screened on the occasion. A special monajat was offered seeking salvation of the departed souls of Bangabandhu and members of his family, who embraced martyrdom on 15 August 1975, and also for the peace, progress and prosperity of Bangladesh.

Earlier, painting and essay competitions for children and students were arranged to commemorate the day and also for National Children Day 2009. Young talents of Bangladeshi origin participated in the competitions, which were held prior to the day’s event. Wife of Bangladesh Ambassador to USA, Mrs. Rokeya Kabir gave away the prizes among the winners.

**Bangladesh is a model of moderation: Ambassador Kabir**

On 4 March 2009 Ambassador M. Humayun Kabir delivered a lecture at the Elliot School of International Affairs at George Washington University in Washington DC. He was invited as a guest speaker by the University’s Sigur Center for Asian Studies and the Ambassadors Forum of the University.

In his lecture titled “New Actors in Dhaka & Washington: Prospect of US-Bangladesh Relations”, Ambassador Kabir drew a parallel between the aspirations for changes both in Bangladesh and the US. Mr. Kabir spoke on Bangladesh’s recent free, fair and credible election and highlighted the main features of the election and elaborated on the uniqueness of some of those features. In this context, he mentioned about the unprecedented large scale participation of the young voters as well as the women voters. This, he said, manifests the total rejection of the two evils - corruption and extremism.

With new political dispensations both in Dhaka and Washington, the two countries can work together on a host of areas, he said. Bangladesh Ambassador identified a whole range of issues - cooperation to curb the menace of terrorism to responding to climate change and energy issues- as possible areas of cooperation between Bangladesh and the United States.

On the qualitative transformation of Bangladesh’s relations with the USA, Ambassador Kabir pointed out that over the years the relationship has evolved from one
of ‘aid dependence’ to that of ‘trade interaction’. He suggested that the new administrations in both the countries should look at their future bilateral relations from this new perspective and economic diplomacy should hold the key to this evolving relationship. Moderated by Ambassador Karl Inderfurth and Dr. Deepa Ollapally, the seminar was attended, among others, by faculty members, researchers, students and media personalities.

**UNC students visits Bangladesh Embassy**

A group of students from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill led by course instructor Ambassador William H. Itoh, Director of Washington International Programs for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, visited the Embassy of Bangladesh on 5 March 2009. This was part of the Embassy’s regular Education Interaction Program and was arranged in collaboration with the Washington Foreign Policy Seminar. The program has been designed to familiarize the visitors with the functioning of the Embassy and the Embassy’s role in promoting Bangladesh-US bilateral relations.

During the briefing session, Bangladesh Ambassador M. Humayun Kabir touched upon various aspects of Bangladesh’s evolution from occupation to an independent country. He said that Bangladesh’s recent parliamentary elections held in December 2008 reflected the evolutionary changes in electoral participation, where young and women voters mostly determined the fate of the elections. The US had also undergone a transformational change in its political landscape following the last presidential election held in November 2008 wherein also young and women voters played a decisive role, he added.

Mr. Kabir shared with the visiting students how Bangladesh, a Muslim majority country, maintained its vibrant cultural heritage and thereby helped its people to retain their secular outlook. This trend was vividly manifested in the recent general elections in Bangladesh. Referring to two new administrations’ assumption of power, he emphasized that Bangladesh and US could work together on a number of issues. Issues like alleviation of poverty, fighting extremism, overcoming the challenges of climate change etc could be considered as priority, he added.

A lively Q&A followed the discussion wherein attending students wanted to know different aspects of Bangladesh ranging from governance to microfinance.

**New Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2009 empowers women**

The government of Bangladesh on 11 February 2009 approved the New Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2009. According to the amended Act, children of Bangladeshi woman married to a foreigner are eligible for the citizenship of Bangladesh. The amended Act accords equal rights to Bangladeshi men and women, who are married to foreign nationals, on the question of citizenship to
their offspring(s). The decision was taken at a cabinet meeting held with Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Previously only the offspring of male Bangladeshi nationals were eligible for citizenship. This amendment not only corrected an omission, it filled a legal void long overdue. This amendment drew wider acclamation in a country which is already known for her strong credential on women empowerment.

**Ambassador Kabir briefed the US Foreign Service Institute (FSI)**

Ambassador Mr. M. Humayun Kabir delivered a lecture at US Foreign Service Institute (FSI) in Arlington, Virginia on 28 February 2009.

During his lecture, Ambassador highlighted the prospects of future Bangladesh-US relations in the backdrop of transformational change in administration after recent elections in Bangladesh and the USA. He suggested that in this time of confrontational regional and global political and economic atmosphere, Bangladesh could offer a new paradigm of relations. With its extensive experience on issues such as poverty alleviation, women empowerment, fighting illiteracy, disaster management, Bangladesh could be an icon of social moderation, which could be leveraged to fight extremism and promote peace and progress in various transitional societies. He suggested that in fighting these global concerns Bangladesh could join hands with the United States. The United States could also get Bangladesh’s support in re-orchestrating its fallen image in the Muslim world through highlighting the fact that there is no conflict between faith and democratic aspiration, which Bangladesh has captured recently through its successful national elections, he asserted.

At the end of the lecture, students of the class participated in a Q&A session, which was moderated by Mr. Bruce Robertson, chair of the Advanced South Asia Area Studies of the Institute. The Foreign Service Institute (FSI), a component of the US Department of State, is the federal government’s primary training institution for officers and support personnel of the US foreign affairs community.

**Bangladesh Parliament Passed the Right to Information Bill**

Bangladesh *Jatiyo Sangsad* (the National Parliament) passed the Right to Information Bill on 29 March 2009. The Council of Advisers on 21 September 2008 approved the much-awaited Right to Information (RTI) Ordinance 2008. It will come into effect upon signing by the President. Tabling the bill in the House, Information Minister Mr. Abul Kalam Azad highlighted the importance of the bill for Bangladesh and its citizens. The members of the civil society and media have been advocating for the passage of this Bill to facilitate free flow of information as well as to ensure people's right to information. This was also a pre-poll pledge of the Awami League-led Grand Alliance. Rights and journalists’ forums have welcomed the passage of the Bill calling it a 'historic step'.

The Bill stipulates creation of new posts in most of the government offices and non-government organizations (NGOs) to provide members of the public with the information they seek within 20 days of the receipt of applications. On issues relating to a person's life and death, arrest and release
from jail, primary information has to be furnished within 24 hours. The law will be applicable from the government offices down to upazila level. The new law aims at ensuring transparency and accountability while curbing corruption to promote good governance.

A three-member Information Commission headed by a Chief Information Commissioner will be formed to ensure enforcement of the law and also to deal with complaints from the information seekers. The Information Commission has been entrusted with the authority to punish or fine officials who will fail to provide primary information on life and death, arrest and release of a person from prison within 24 hours. The Honorable President will appoint the Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners on the basis of suggestions from a five-member Selection Committee. This Selection Committee will comprise a judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court as head the selection committee, two parliament members - one each from the treasury and opposition benches- to be nominated by the Speaker, one eminent citizen to be nominated by the government. The Cabinet Secretary will be the other member of the Selection Committee.

As per provision of the ordinance, if an assigned official does not provide information to an information-seeker as per the law, s/he will have to pay Taka 50 for a day’s delay and a total fine not exceeding Taka 5,000.00. The ordinance will not cover National Security Intelligence, Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, Military Intelligence Directorate, Special Security Force, Criminal Investigation Department of Police and Central Intelligence Cell of the National Board of Revenue. This provision waiving the obligation of such agencies not to render information will, however, not apply if the information concerns corruption and human rights violation.

**Bangladesh-US Relations have shifted from Aid Dependence to Trade Interaction: Ambassador Kabir**

Bangladesh’s relations with the United States had undergone a shift, from aid dependence to trade interaction. Ambassador Mr. M. Humayun Kabir said this in an interview with Voice of America’s head of Bangla Service Mr. Iqbal Bahar Chowdhury for the NTV in Bangladesh. Underscoring the need for adjusting the priorities in the context of the new matrix in Bangladesh’s bilateral relations with the US, he identified the following areas for interaction between the two countries under the economic diplomacy: trade, investment, knowledge and technology transfer, and sharing of skills.

On the issue of specific avenues for potential engagement with the Obama administration, Ambassador Kabir mentioned the areas in which Bangladesh excelled. In this context, he said that Bangladesh could be a model of liberal Muslim democracy. He also mentioned about the resilience of the people of Bangladesh in the face of the natural calamities. Mr. Kabir said that Bangladesh’s home grown strategy for poverty alleviation had shielded the society from extremist ideas. The Obama administration and the government of Bangladesh could work in these common areas of interests, he said.

On the various ongoing schemes taken in Bangladesh, Ambassador Kabir said that under the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s dynamic leadership Bangladesh is committed to work for a prosperous country to eventually turn it into a ‘Digital
Bangladesh’, a vision to be fulfilled by 2021 as outlined in the election manifesto of the ruling party.

In the interview given on the eve of the 38th anniversary of Bangladesh’s National and Independence Day, Mr. Kabir conveyed his warm wishes and felicitation to the members of expatriate Bangladesh community in the US as well to the friendly people and government of the United States.

Independence Day Award 2008

Four eminent persons of Bangladesh had been awarded Independence Day Award for the year of 2008. They are: Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury for Literature, Abdul Matin for Culture, Professor AM Harunur Rashid for Science and Technology and late Ivy Rahman for Philanthropy. Awardees’ received Taka Twenty Five thousand in cash, a gold medal and a certificate of honor each. Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave away the awards at a function held in Dhaka on 26 March 2009.

This is the highest award given by the government, which was introduced in 1977 in memory of the martyrs of the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

Samia Mahbub Ahmad Selected by the Montgomery County Council

The Board of Directors and the Grants Committee of the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County (AHCMC), State of Maryland has selected Mrs. Samia Mahbub Ahmed, an expatriate Bangladeshi singer, for their “Roster of Artists and Scholars.” Mrs. Ahmed is an artist specializing on north Indian classical, semi-classical and Nazrul Sangeet.

The AHCMC Roster is a list of pre-screened, high-quality artists and scholars.

Children’s Essay and Painting Competition at the Embassy
As part of the observance of the 89th Birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and also to celebrate the National Children Day-2009, the Embassy of Bangladesh organized an essay and painting competition for the expatriate Bangladeshi students of grade 4 to 8. Painting competition had the theme: ‘Bangladesh’s Landscape’, which was held at the Embassy premises on 14 March 2009. The winners of the painting competition were:

- Miss. Urmana Islam,
- Master Chowdhury Fahadul Bari (Sakib)
- Miss. Fara Islam.

The essay competition was on ‘Bangabandhu and the Independence of Bangladesh’ which drew a good number of participants. Participating young minds had the opportunity to apply their linguistic skills as well as analytical ability to highlight the glimpses of Bangabandhu’s colorful life. Miss Wadia Mahzabeen, a sixth grader from Virginia won the first prize while Miss. Sanchari Rahman and Miss Urnisha Bhuiyan came 2nd and 3rd respectively. Wife of the Bangladesh Ambassador to USA, Mrs. Rokeya Kabir gave away the prizes to the winners at a program held at the Embassy on 17 March 2009.

### Business

#### Singapore-Bangladesh Company to invest $ 4.793 million for CETP in Dhaka EPZ

A Singapore-Bangladesh joint venture company named M/s. D-Water C.E.T.P. Ecosystems (BD) Limited is going to establish Central Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) in Dhaka Export Processing Zone. The company will invest US$ 4.793 million, with the aim of treating 15,000-43,000 thousand cubic meters liquid effluent per day of the industries of the Dhaka EPZ. They will establish Central Effluent Treatment Plant in a land area of 16000 square meter.

An agreement to this effect has been signed between the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority and the M/s D-Water C.E.T.P. Ecosystems (BD) Limited in BEPZA Complex, Dhaka recently.

This plant, upon completion, will not only help removing pollutants from EPZs, will also create employment opportunity for 35 Bangladeshi and 07 foreign nationals.

#### Korea provides $ 3.00 million investment in Karnaphuli EPZ

Resource Foam & Accessories, a Bangladeshi company will set up a foam, armlets & shoe accessories industry in the
Karnaphuli Export Processing Zone (EPZ). This 100% locally owned company will invest 3.010 million US$ in setting up their unit and will produce Foam, Woven Labels, Poly Bag, Tags, Carton etc. The company will also create employment opportunity for 294 Bangladeshi nationals. An agreement to this effect has been signed between the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority and the Mis Resource Foam & Accessories in BEPZA Complex, Dhaka on March 08, 2009.

HK Company to invest $ 43.799 million in KEPZ

A Hong Kong-Taiwan based shoe company will invest US$43.799 million to set up manufacturing units to produce finished leather, footwear, leather-goods and other related components in Karnaphuli Export Processing Zone (KEPZ). The company named Bangladesh Pou Hung Industrial Ltd (BPHIL) will also create employment opportunity for 3,582 Bangladeshis and 57 foreign nationals.

An agreement to this effect was signed between Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) and BPHIL in BEPZA complex recently.

Bangladeshi Company to invest US$ 2.501 million in Comilla EPZ

M/s. Etasia Interlinings Limited, a Bangladeshi company will set up an Interlining Manufacturing Industry in the Comilla Export Processing Zone.

This 100 per cent local owned company will invest US$ 2.501 million to set up their plant and will produce interlining items. The company will also create employment opportunity for 94 Bangladeshi nationals. An agreement to this effect was signed between the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority and the M/s. Etasia Interlinings Limited in BEPZA Complex, Dhaka on 17 March 2009.

Leather Goods, Footwear Export Marks 20 percent Growth in 2008

In 2008, Bangladesh exported leather goods and footwear to the tune of $195.24 million, posting a 20 per cent growth from 2007, the executive committee of Leather goods and Footwear Manufacturers and Exporters’ Association of Bangladesh informed the 5th annual general meeting of the Association. The meeting was held at Hotel Lake Shore in Dhaka on 8 March 2009.

Of the export proceeds in 2008, footwear accounted for $183.54 million and leather goods $11.7 million. In 2007, the sector earned $162.73 million from exports with footwear accounting for $152.77 million and leather goods $9.96 million.
PHOTO GALLERY

National and Independence Day 2009

Birth Anniversary of the Father of the Nation

Embassy Events

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