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US Congress urges the President for generous “incentives” for Bangladesh

The US House of Representatives unanimously passed a resolution on 23 September 2008 urging the US President to consider extending generous economic support to Bangladesh upon completion of an internationally accepted free and fair election before the end of December 2008. The House of Representative in its resolution H.R. 1402 titled “Supporting a transition to democracy through free, fair, credible, peaceful, and transparent elections in Bangladesh” made this request to the US President.

The Resolution recognized the Caretaker Government’s initiatives to eradicate corruption from all levels of government and society through institutional and policy reforms. The House also urged all political parties to participate in the elections so that democratic governance in Bangladesh could continue the fight against corruption and intensify efforts for institutional and policy reforms. In this connection, the US Congress welcomed the Caretaker Government’s
initiative to hold dialogue with all political parties and civil society organizations. In the Resolution, the House of Representative members expressed their strong support to the restoration of democracy in Bangladesh. Congress also urged the Government of Bangladesh “to lift the state of emergency to allow free and fair elections to occur”.

Most notably, for the first time ever, the Congress urged the US President to make democratic transition in Bangladesh a “high priority of United States foreign policy”. Finally, the Congress affirmed “willingness of the United States to provide assistance” to Bangladesh in its quest for a peaceful transition to democracy.

The Resolution was moved in the influential Committee on Foreign Affairs with co-sponsorship of as many as forty-one Congressmen. Congressman Joseph Crowley, who is also the co-chair of Congressional Bangladesh Caucus, sponsored this resolution. The Embassy of Bangladesh in Washington, DC worked closely with Congressmen Crowley and other Congressmen to get this resolution passed.

According to Congressional experts, consideration of a resolution on Bangladesh at the last remaining precious hours of this Congress speaks for itself about how the US is going to recalibrate her foreign policy priorities vis-à-vis Bangladesh in the days to come. Hon’ble Chief Adviser Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed welcomed the initiative of the US Congress and stated that this is indeed a recognition of the creative efforts undertaken by the democracy loving people and the government of Bangladesh to strengthen democratic and accountable governance, which could serve the interest of the common men and women. He, once again, expressed resolve of his government to hold free, fair and credible elections in Bangladesh on 18 December 2008.

Hon'ble Chief Adviser calls for setting up of Global Food Bank

The Hon'ble Chief Adviser Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed led the Bangladesh delegation to the 63rd United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). During his stay in New York, he addressed the plenary of the United Nations General Assembly on 26 September 2008 and participated at a roundtable on 'Poverty and hunger' on 25 September 2008. The Chief Adviser also attended the Special Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting (CHOGM) and high level plenary meeting on Africa's development needs.

The Chief Advisor, who also spoke on behalf of the Least Developed Countries, at the general debate segment of the General Assembly on 26 September 2008 stressed the importance of food security, democracy and development, which are inextricably linked to one another, and are of fundamental importance to welfare of the Bangladesh as well as of other LDCs. The Chief Adviser said that the recent global rise in food price had been acutely felt in Bangladesh. He mentioned that for a country like Bangladesh, such steep increase in food prices had significant adverse effects on food security, poverty and human development.

Calling for long - term solutions for a hunger-free world, he said that the food security for all citizens in this world must be acknowledged not just as a development imperative, but also as a moral imperative. Food insecurity could disrupt the core of a democratic polity and derail its development priorities. The Chief Adviser urged the UN Secretary General to look into the possibility of creating a Global Food Bank.

On the adverse impact of climate change on Bangladesh, Chief Adviser said that a one-meter sea - level rise would submerge about one- third of the total area of Bangladesh. Given
the country's population and its vulnerabilities, this would result in the greatest humanitarian crisis in history. He said that the international efforts to minimize emission levels should not, however, disproportionately tax poorer nations. He said that the LDCs must have guaranteed access to appropriate mitigation technologies and know-how at affordable terms. The post-Kyoto agreement should set up a Technology Transfer Board to ensure that the LDCs have access to affordable, eco-friendly technologies.

The Hon’ble Chief Adviser mentioned in his address that his caretaker government is now totally focused on fulfilling the pledge to hold free and fair parliamentary polls on 18 December 2008. He expressed the confidence that all political parties would participate in the elections under new laws and regulations. He said that the government had completed the monumental task of electronically registering over 80 million voters with photographs and fingerprints.

On the sidelines of the UNGA session, the Hon’ble Chief Adviser held bilateral talks with world leaders attending the session. He also held meeting with the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon at the UN headquarters.

Apart from these programmes, the Chief Adviser also exchanged views with the expatriate Bangladeshi community at a civic reception given in his honour by the Embassy of Bangladesh in Washington, DC. He also interacted with the New York based Bangladeshi journalists. During his interaction with expatriate Bangladeshis and New York based journalists, the Chief Adviser gave answers to a number of questions raised by them regarding country’s politics, institutional reforms, development, transition to democracy and investment opportunities.

He gave a clear overview of the government's efforts especially the successful completion of the huge task of the preparation of voter list with photograph, success in raising the food production against two consecutive floods and cyclone Sidr riding on the resilience of the common masses, and improvement in law and order across the country. Hon’ble Chief Adviser also met with the members of Network of Young Bangladesh-American Professionals (NYBAP).

He also gave interviews with several foreign media, including Al Jazeera TV Channel and Time Magazine, during his visit. The Chief Adviser was accompanied, among others, by Mrs. Neena Ahmed, Foreign Affairs Adviser Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury.

Council of Adviser approves Right to Information ordinance

The Council of Advisers at a meeting presided over by the Hon’ble Chief Adviser Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed on 20 September 2008 approved the Right to Information Ordinance to ensure transparency in government and private offices by providing information to common people on demand. According to the proposed ordinance, an information Commission would be formed with three members to be appointed on a four year term. The Commission will supervise the general activities related to people’s right to information.

The President will appoint the Chairman and members of the Commission at the suggestion of a five-member selection committee headed by a judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. The other members of the Commission will be two lawmakers from the treasury and opposition benches of the parliament nominated by the Jatiya Sangsad Speaker, the Cabinet Secretary and a government representative. The government will also appoint an appropriate number of officials and employees at the suggestion of the autonomous commission to discharge its responsibilities across the country.

Under the law, people will have the right to seek information from public offices in a prescribed form. The public offices will also maintain information so that the people can get information on demand. If any official refuses to provide information, individuals can file appeals with the information Commission. The officials may be penalized TK 50 a day up to TK 5,000 for such refusal. The new law exempted
from public disclosure of a number of matters
which included information related to state
security, sovereignty and defense.

Adviser for Commerce and Education
visited Washington, DC


During his visit, he also attended a round table
discussion on “Bangladesh’s Transition to
Democracy” at the Heritage Foundation, a
Washington, DC think tank. In his statement,
the Hon’ble Adviser underscored the fact that
“The Caretaker Government is only pursuing a
pragmatic strategy keeping the goal intact”. Dr. Hossain also said that the Caretaker
Government has not shifted away from their
goal of establishing a sustainable democracy
through a free, fair and credible election before the end of 2008. At the same time, as a means to political transition, the Government had intensified the process of involving the people from all works of life in the decision making process and thereby ensuring good governance and accountability in public administration. He, however, acknowledged that the Government had to adjust their strategies with a view to facilitating the process of bridging the goals of political parties and the aspirations of the common people of Bangladesh.

The Commerce and Education Adviser
informed the audience about the economic
potential of Bangladesh. In this context, he
asserted that the country had been maintaining a healthy growth rate of over 6 percent over the last few years and narrated the reform initiatives undertaken by the present government to tap into these economic opportunities.

During the question-answer session the
Hon’ble Adviser observed that by any measure today’s Bangladesh is different from what it was before 1/11. Citing some examples of recent political incidents in Bangladesh, Dr. Hossain informed that Bangladesh is not going back to the chaos that led to development on 11 January 2007. He also gave an outline of government’s ongoing initiatives for dialogue with the political parties and hoped that a broader understanding could be reached at so that the reform initiatives undertaken by the government could continue after the elections. On a question on lifting emergency before the election, Dr. Hossain informed the audience that the Government is willing to relax the provisions of the emergency act to the maximum extent in the interest of holding a free, fair and credible election.

Participating in the discussion Mr. Sameer Sahgal of Boeing endorsed the fact that many positive changes have indeed taken place in Bangladesh during the last two years and requested fellow Americans to visit Bangladesh to see for themselves the changes on the ground. Concurring with Mr. Sameer, the Adviser informed the audience that many avenues of economic activities such as ship building, ICT outsourcing have been opened in recent times.

The event was attended by State Department
officials, academics and scholars, congressional
staff Members, members of the media, business
community etc. Bangladesh Ambassador to
USA Mr. M. Humayun Kabir and other officials
of Bangladesh Embassy in Washington DC
were also present at the event.

Bangladesh elected UNCTAD President

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Permanent
Representative of Bangladesh in Geneva, has
been elected President of Trade & Development
Board (TDB) of the United Nations Conference
on Trade & Development (UNCTAD) for one
year. Ambassador Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya
was unanimously elected by the 193 UN
Member states to this post.

As president of TDB, Dr Bhattacharya will lead
UNCTAD in implementing the instructions and
guidelines provided by Heads of States and
Governments and the Ministers during the
UNCTAD conference held in Accra, Ghana
earlier this year. He will also give leadership to inter-governmental and inter-agency dialogues on current issues of critical concerns in the areas of trade and development.

**Bangladesh donated US$ 100,000.00 for flood victims in Nepal**

Bangladesh has donated one hundred thousand US dollar to Nepal for the welfare of the flood victims. Bangladesh Ambassador to Nepal Mr. Imtiaz Ahmed handed over a cheque of the donation to Nepalese Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal at Prime Minister's residence at Baluwatar in Kathmandu recently.

**Bangladesh received US$ 6.8 billion remittance until Sept 2008: Foreign Adviser**

Hon’ble Adviser for Foreign Affairs Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, who is also Adviser for the Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare & Overseas Employment, said that expatriate workers had sent US$6.8 billion as remittance until September 2008 against last year's total amount of US$6.6 billion. The Adviser in a statement said that he expected that the amount of remittance would stand US$9 billion by December 2008.

The Hon’ble Adviser also stated that the market of overseas jobs for Bangladeshi workers continued to expand. He said some 690,000 workers got clearance till September 2008 for overseas jobs against last year's 592,000.

**Eid-ul-Fitr celebrated in Washington DC**

The holy Eid-ul-Fitr, one of the biggest religious festivals of the Muslims, was celebrated across the United States with due festivity this year. To celebrate this occasion with the Bangladeshi community in the US, Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States H.E. M. Humayun Kabir and Mrs. Rokeya Kabir invited the members of Bangladesh community to an Open House at the Bangladesh Embassy premises on the Eid day. A good number of expatriate Bangladeshis turned out at the Embassy to join the celebration. They were treated with sweetmeats and traditional Bangladeshi delicacies. All officials of the Embassy along with their family members were present during the occasion.

**Durga Puja celebrated across the country peacefully**

Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Hindu community, concluded on Thursday, 15 October 2008 through ceremonial immersion of images of goddess Durga after five days of worship and festivities. This year, Bijoya Dashami was celebrated in over 22,000 puja mandaps across the country. Of the total, 165 mandops were set up in the capital alone.

Although Durga Puja is a religious festival of the Hindu community, the joy and festivity has a broader social appeal. Like Eid and Christmas it brightens the social atmosphere and the people can share their joy and happiness during the festive days.

On the occasion of Durga puja, Hon’ble President Professor Dr. Iajuddin Ahmed and his wife Anwara Begum hosted a reception for the members of the Hindu community at Bangabhaban. The state-run and private television channels and radios aired special programmes while newspapers published supplements during this great religious festival.

US Ambassador in Dhaka James F Moriarty visited a number of Puja mandaps (worship pavilions) on the occasion of the Durga Puja. The envoy said this time is very important as the Eid, Puja and elections are being held near simultaneously. Bangladesh is similar to the US
in the sense that people from many faiths and religions live in both of these two countries. Doing the Eid and Puja at a time, the Muslims and Hindus have proved that Bangladesh is a country of communal harmony, he observed.

Bangladesh: a potential destination for eco-tourism in South Asia

Bangladesh enjoys a unique geo-location, being easily accessible from many popular destinations in South Asia and major cities of the world. This is a real advantage that provides a truly pristine and exciting destination for travelers. Among many destinations worth visiting in Bangladesh the most proper eco-tourism spots are the Sundarbans (worlds largest mangrove forests), St. Martin’s Island, Rangamati and Kaptai Lakes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, eco-forests in Cox’s Bazar, Nijhum Deep (island) in the Bay of Bengal and Lawacherra Rain Forest in north eastern part of Bangladesh.

Among the above potential spots, we will take our readers to a few areas that are largely unknown, and having unspoiled natural beauty and reserves, which are simply unique and fascinating.

One of those areas is St. Martins Island, a beautiful Coral Island where tourists will find live corals.

This small coral island about 10km (6miles) southwest of the southern tip of the mainland is a tropical cliché, with beaches fringed with coconut palms and bountiful marine life. There is nothing more strenuous to do here than soak up the rays, but it is a clean and peaceful place without anything to disrupt serenity. It is possible to walk around the island in a day because it measures only 8 sq km (3 sq miles), shrinking to about 5 sq km (2 sq miles) during high tide. Most of island’s 5500 inhabitants live primarily from fishing, and between October and April fishermen from neighboring areas bring their catch to the island’s temporary wholesale market. One can also find here the beautiful Coral reef and long Coral beach and lots of coconut trees. The local name of the coconut is Narikel and the original name of this Island, Narikel Jinjira is derived from that. If one is lucky enough then he or she can spend the exotic moonlit night at St. Martins Island. The beauty of full moon in St. Martins Island cannot be expressed in words. This is something to be experienced only. A part of the island derived in between tides is known as Cheera-dwip (separated). Tourists can go to Cheera-dwip by walking (two and a half hours walk) by local motorboat or tourist boat. People do not live in this Island, so advisable for the tourists to go there early and come back by afternoon.
**How to get there**

It is only 30 km from Teknaf, the most southwest sub-district of Bangladesh and one can go there by local motorboat, tourist boats, or sea truck. There are a number of luxurious bus services that run from Dhaka or Chittagong to Teknaf via Cox’s Bazar.

The **Nijhum Dwip**, an island with forest and deep blue water of the Bay of Bengal in the south of Bangladesh attracts hundreds of tourists during the winter season. The name 'Nijhum Dwip' itself contains a romantic connotation about the place; it gives one a sense of silence and natural splendour unsullied by human exploration. The island is situated between Noakhali and Bhola. It is the southern most island of Bangladesh that lies in the precarious mouth of the river Padma.

The island has 20 kms of long sandy and grassy beach. Oysters of various nature and snails can be easily seen in the island. The tourists in the island can enjoy sunrise and sunset from the island.

Four decades ago, the island was under deep water. But, the silt carried by the Himalayan Rivers into the sea helped surface this island over the period. In 1972 the forest department began afforestation programs in the island. Later, the government declared the Nijhum Deep as a ‘national garden’. The Bay waves that irrigate the forest more than once a day helped grow quickly the planted Keowra, Geowra, Bain and Kakra and other valuable trees. Wild animals -the spotted deers, monkey, buffalo, snakes and 35 species of birds-- made the island attractive for the tourists. During the winter season, thousands of guest birds migrate to this island to add more to its beauty. In 1978, four pairs of spotted deers were released in the forest and now the number of deer has increased to around 6000. The visitors can easily watch these attractive animals.

**How to get there**

To pay a visit in the Nijhum Deep is adventurous and enjoyable. Tourists from Dhaka can avail the motor launches plying between Dhaka and Hatia (in south bangladesh) to reach the island. From Chittagong (the port city) tourists can avail sea-truck to go to Hatia. From Hatia the tourists can get transport to reach the island. From Dhaka or Chittagong the tourists by train or road transports can also reach Sonapur in Noakhali from where they can avail steamer service or sea truck to go to Hatia.

A number of hotels and rest houses, besides government bungalows, are now available in the island to stay there.

**Lawacherra Rain Forest** is one of the important & well-reserved forests in Bangladesh. Here visitor may see gibbons swimming through the trees and birds like bee-eater, owls, parrot and a few species of Pheasants, Hornbills, Forktails and Laughing thrushes. It is a good habitat of deer, leopard, wild chicken, squirrel, and python. It is a place not to be missed especially if one is a bird watcher. The terrain is hilly and vegetation is fairly thick. Rare Chloroform tree of Asia is the prime attraction. **Khasia & Manipuri**, the two important ethnic-tribes live here. Manipuri is famous for its rich culture especially for dancing and singing. It is known as colorful community. They are also famous for their traditional weaving. Tourists can buy their exquisitely woven woolen handicrafts. Khasia tribe is famous for their betel leaf cultivation. They make their villages high on hilltop in deep forest and far from towns. It is like "A Piece of Paradise".

**How to get there**

Lawacherra is located in Srimongol of Moulvibazar district. Srimongol is located about 177 kms (110 miles) northeast of Dhaka city and easily accessible by car and bus. The Lawacherra rainforest is within 10 kms from
Bangladesh-Japan joint Venture Company to invest $3.72 million at KEPZ

Daiei International Limited, a Bangladesh-Japan joint venture company will set up an eco-parking machine manufacturing industry at CSD area of Karnaphuli Export Processing Zone.

This jointly owned company will invest about Taka 25 crore in setting up its plant and will manufacture 1300 eco-parking machine annually for export. The company will also create employment opportunities for 341 Bangladeshi workers, including 10 foreign nationals.

An agreement to this effect was signed between Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority and Messrs Daiei International Limited at BEPZA Complex in Dhaka recently.

UK drawn to Dhaka call centres at Expo 2008

UK companies have shown interest in setting up call centres in Bangladesh after a presentation by Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission officials at a Birmingham exposition. The two-day Call Centre Expo 2008 began in the British midlands city on 15 September 2008.

BTRC Chairman, Manzurul Alam, gave a presentation on the telecommunication industry, explaining why Bangladesh could be a good destination for call centres of big UK companies. "Bangladesh is not just a country of natural disasters. We have resources. The telecommunication sector offers a huge potential," the BTRC chief told his audience. "We are capable of offering world class service. Foreign companies should come and invest."

Seven Bangladeshi firms joined the expo to explore opportunities: InGen Technology, Aamra Outsourcing Ltd, HMC Technology Ltd, Iqra Media Centre, Legato Services Ltd, Orbit Communications and Windmill Advertising Ltd.

The BTRC started giving license for call centre in April this year. The telecoms regulator issued 310 licenses in three categories – Call Centre, Hosted Call Centre and Hosted Call Centre Service Provider.

Sri Lanka Bank eyes Bangladesh

Sri Lanka's National Development Bank (NDB) has received approval to establish an investment bank in Bangladesh. In a recent stock exchange filing, NDB said it had got approval from the Central Bank of Sri Lanka,
and was now awaiting approval from the finance ministry and regulatory authorities in Sri Lanka including the Controller of Exchange, as well as Bangladeshi authorities. The bank's statement to the stock exchange said it had already carried out a feasibility study on operating an investment bank in Bangladesh, with the objective of having a majority shareholding.

NDB has also been negotiating with a prospective investee company and its shareholders, it said. The statement said the transaction will take place after it gets the required approvals and completes the terms and conditions of a joint venture agreement between NDB, the prospective investee company and its shareholders.

The National Development Bank is the third Sri Lankan bank to set up business in Bangladesh, after Commercial Bank and Sampath Bank.

**German Company Germanischer Lloyd ordered new ships from Ananda Shipyard**

Germanischer, a leading global classification society has ordered two 7,250 dwt multi-purpose vessels to be built at Ananda Shipyard in Bangladesh. Germanischer who supervises and improves safety and quality on behalf of many maritime and industrial customers has booked this order for German ship owners Komrowski and Herrmann Lohmann Schiffahrt.

Germanischer Lloyd’s Member of the Executive Board Dr Hermann J. Klein and Ananda Shipyard's Managing Director Mrs. Afruja Bari signed the agreement at SMM in Hamburg.

"In Bangladesh we can produce ships to international standards." said Dr Abdullahel Bari, Chairman of Ananda Shipyard at the signing ceremony at the Germanischer Lloyd booth. The two multi-purpose-vessels belong to a series of ten orders, order for eight of which were placed in December 2007.

The current order book of Ananda Shipyard includes ships from 2,900 dwt to 7,250 dwt for owners from Germany, Denmark and Mozambique. The production area comprises 80,000 square meters; more than 1,120 people are employed by the yard.

**Indian RMG unit in Dhaka EPZ shortly**

An Indian company will set up a woven and knit garments industry in Dhaka Export Processing Zone involving US$ 9.776 million or about Tk 67 crore.

This 100% foreign owned company, Lenny Apparels Limited, will also create employment opportunity for 1620 Bangladeshis and 61 foreign nationals. An agreement to this effect was signed between Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority and Lenny Apparels at Bepza Complex here in September this year.

**Korean company to invest Tk 85cr in Chittagong EPZ**

A Korean firm will set up a tent, sleeping bag, camping furniture and accessories manufacturing unit in the Chittagong Export Processing Zone and invest an amount of Taka 85 crore. This foreign-owned company, OFMA Camp Limited, is estimated to produce 15 to 30 million pieces of tents, sleeping bags, other camping furniture and accessories a year. The company will create employment opportunities for 780 Bangladeshi people and five foreigners. An agreement to this effect was signed between the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority and the OFMA Camp Limited at BEPZA Complex in Dhaka on 15 September 2008.
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