

Memoirs of a Swiss and a Bangladeshi

In 2006, Bangladesh and Switzerland are celebrating 35 years of relations and friendship. The Swiss Embassy in Dhaka asked a Bangladeshi and a Swiss about their memories of the time of Bangladesh's independence, when the relations between the two countries started.



A Swiss in Bangladesh

Göpf Berweger

Göpf Berweger visited Bangladesh for about 6 months in 1971 and 1972. He was one of the first delegates of the International League of Red Cross Societies working for victims of devastating cyclone that hit coastal belt of Bangladesh on November 13, 1970

What was your main assignment?
Our main job in 1971 was to get hundreds of tons of relief goods, mainly in the harbor of Chittagong, de-blocked and cleared for distribution and distributed to the victim areas of the cyclone. Also we wanted to get a clearer idea about the cyclone's effects and possibilities to prevent similar effects for the future.

What difficulties did you face in 1971?
It turned out to be an extremely difficult task because of the oppressive role of the Pakistani military personnel on one side and the Bengali liberation movements on the other. It was especially cumbersome to get hold of some steamers and boats to be able to move in the coastal belt and to transport relief goods.

What was your role in 1972?
In summer 1972, after the formal independence of Bangladesh, my first assignment was a short stay in the Khulna District area with the local Red Cross branch for milk feeding programme for children, providing basic supply such as wheat, soya, beans and sugar as well as medical treatments.

Where there many Swiss in Bangladesh at that time?
In the delegations of the League of Red Cross Society and International Committee of Red Cross there were a good number of Swiss citizens. For official support, in 1971 Swiss diplomatic and consulate staff was accessible for us in Calcutta, and in 1972 there was already established a sort of official or semi-official presence in a small office in the largest Dhaka hotel. First Representatives of Swiss technical cooperation (SDC) as well as a good number of Swiss NGOs were also in the country then.

Can you tell a special moment you remember?
When we visited a little island south of Hatiya Island in the delta we met one or two dozens of men only. An elderly man told us what had happened in those brutal days of the cyclone, how they have lost a good number of their family members, how they managed to survive, and how life had become even harsher than what it was before. To our surprise these men were absolutely willing to stay on and to live further on their island, regardless whether they had to expect other cyclones and tidal waves to happen in the area - they just felt that their lives were anyway in the hands of God.

A Bangladeshi in Switzerland

Wali-ur Rahman

Wali-ur Rahman went to Switzerland in 1969 to join the Pakistan Embassy in Bern. In 1971, he resigned from the Government of Pakistan in protest against the genocide perpetrated by the Pakistan troops in former East Pakistan.

What did you do after the Pakistani troops invaded Bangladesh in 1971?
I declared my allegiance to the Government of Bangladesh in exile in 1971 and shifted to Geneva. The apartment at 7, Rue Robert De Traz, Rue Florissant, Rive Gauche, was both my residence and the Bangladesh mission for over nine months.

So, you sought political asylum in Switzerland?
Yes. I was given political asylum by the Swiss Federal Government without much hassle. The Foreign Minister Mr. Pierre Graber and head of the Federal Immigration Department, Mr. Hans Mumenthaler was particularly helpful to me and my family. During the war of liberation, the Swiss people and the Government showed unprecedented solidarity with the struggling people of Bangladesh. The German part, Italian part and the French region all got together in support of the cause of the people of Bangladesh. Most importantly, vital support was provided by the Swiss Red Cross, The League of Red Cross Societies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Caritas.

Do you remember other individuals or institutions which supported Bangladesh's cause?
The Swiss Radio, Television and Press came out in full support to our cause, the cause of the Bengalee freedom. The name of a few persons will ever remain in the history of Swiss-Bangladesh relations. Dr. Victor Umbricht, Director, Ciba-Geigy and adviser to the Federal Government and Special Envoy to the UN Secretary General, was of crucial help to us. In addition Mr. Edmund Kaiser of Terre Des Hommes, Jean Ziegler, Member of Parliament and President of the Pro-Bangladesh movement in Switzerland made invaluable contribution to our cause. The list goes on.

What was your most emotional moment in Switzerland during the war of Bangladesh's independence?
When I became a refugee, it was an uncanny feeling, a refugee who did not yet have a country, the country we are fighting for. At one point in November, 1971, I was invited to the Plaza before the Swiss Parliament, as a guest to the pro-Bangladesh rally, organized and attended by men, women, young boys, girls and children. I was moved. I cried when the children sang our national anthem and held Bangladesh flag in their hands.



Alpine Festival in the mountains near Bern.

Arts and crafts from Switzerland

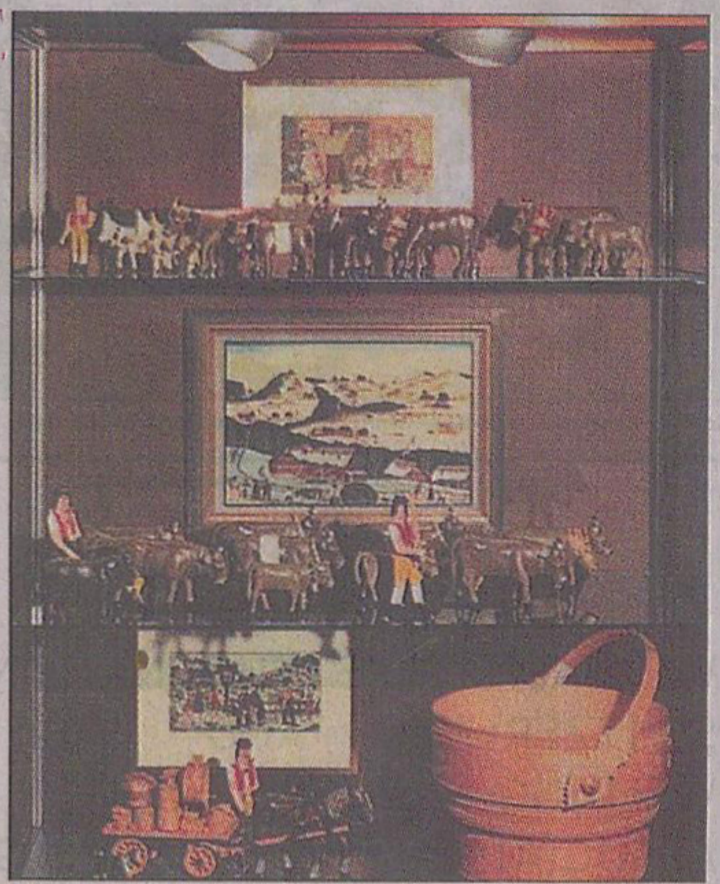
THE "Arts and Crafts from Switzerland" exhibition, donated to the Bangladesh National Museum, consists of a collection of arts and crafts developed through the centuries from the various regions within Switzerland. The exhibition is made up of around 150 objects. It was prepared by Federal Department of Foreign Affairs' Cultural Service in Switzerland with the aim to facilitate inter-cultural dialogues in the countries where it would be exhibited. Traditional arts and crafts in Switzerland

Arts and crafts developed across the centuries through the manufacture of objects for everyday use still reveal today various influences which know no political boundaries. Arts and crafts from northern Switzerland, for example, are clearly part of the Alpine culture, while a Latin influence dominates in the Tessin. The differences are most marked in the types of motifs and decoration used.

There are two distinct types of traditional arts and crafts rural and urban. The rural arts and crafts are influenced by the rural way of life; cattle, working the land and the rural lifestyle are the themes most often used in this case. The urban arts and crafts, which reveal the influence of different cultural currents which originated in European cultural centres such as London, Munich, Paris or Rome also left their mark in Swiss towns.

Rural arts and crafts flourished in particular in the areas where the population enjoyed a certain level of freedom and prosperity attained through either the fertility of the soil or the work people did at home. In contrast, areas characterised by large estates owned by the nobility did not produce traditional arts and crafts.

In the 19th century traditional rural handicrafts truly blossomed in the area extending from eastern Switzerland (Appenzell) to the Bernese Oberland and the neighbouring Emmentaler, a major centre of production of ceramics. The cow a traditional symbol of prosperity, was a very popular motif for decoration, as were figures dressed in middle-class clothes, demonstrating a certain desire for social betterment.



At the beginning of the 20th century, the rapid industrialisation of many parts of Switzerland resulted in the loss of many aspects of a rich national culture. In contrast to the Scandinavian countries, for instance which made the most of their traditions to revive them in modern interior design, Switzerland did not succeed in integrating traditional national popular art into contemporary lifestyle.

In the 1930s, however, Switzerland rediscovered the roots of its handicraft culture, allowing its heritage to blossom once again and enjoy a sort of renaissance a phenomenon which at that time also bore a nationalist note which was not entirely harmless. The Swiss National Exhibition in 1939, however, marked a clear repositioning and an openness towards new ideas.

Today popular art is mainly influenced by the schools of applied art in the larger Swiss

towns. New techniques are taught and foreign ideas are welcomed. In fact, contemporary popular art in Switzerland is also flourishing in the wake of major international cultural trends. National or regional motifs and decoration, and typical Swiss designs are used rarely, but with pleasing results.

"Arts & Crafts from Switzerland" exhibition donated to Bangladesh National Museum

The exhibition materials of "Arts and Crafts from Switzerland" were donated by the Government of Switzerland to the Bangladesh National Museum after travelling to over 20 countries. The exhibition was displayed at the Bangladesh National Museum in July-August 2004, drawing huge interest among general public in Bangladesh. Around 25,000 people visited the exhibition at that time. The exhibition has now found a permanent abode at the Swiss Corner of Bangladesh National Museum.

Power sharing and direct democracy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12
come from pressure groups rather than individuals. If they manage to gather 100,000 signatures in support of the proposal, it must be put to a nation-wide vote. The Swiss use the term "referendum" for a popular vote called to challenge a piece of legislation already approved by the Federal Assembly. If any person or group opposed to the new law manages to collect 50,000 signatures within 100 days of the official publication of the proposed legislation, the voters as a whole are given the chance to decide. In most cases, a referendum is only called if those who feel strongly about the issue manage to collect enough signatures.



Direct Democracy: Collecting signatures for a popular initiative.



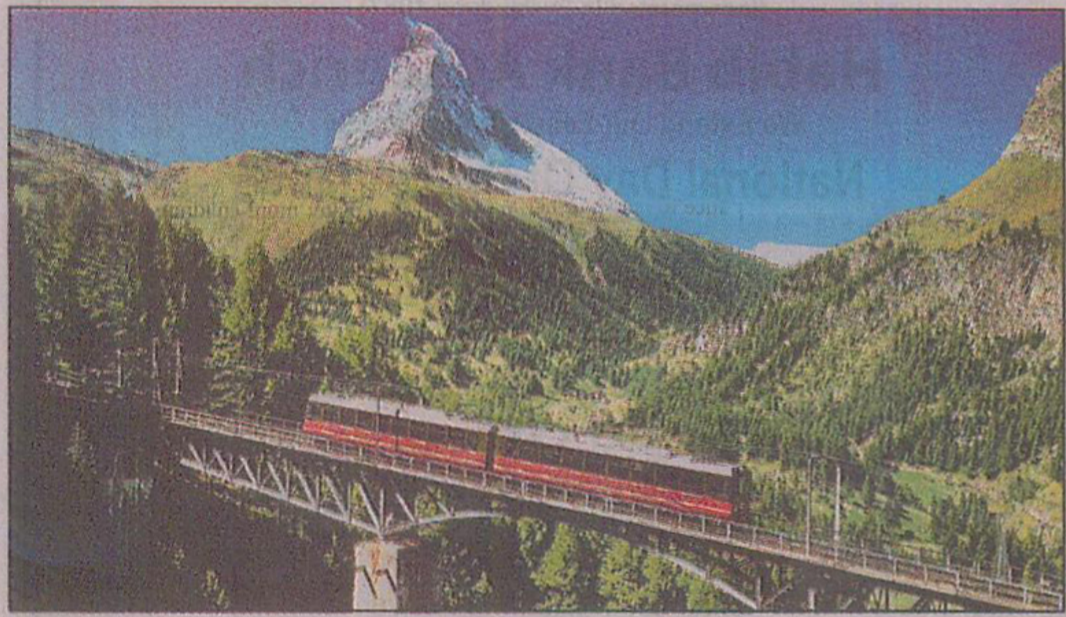
Federal Parliament Building, Bern: The larger chamber, the National Council.

Language diversity and 'Swissness'

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happens that everybody speaks in their mother tongue, and it is assumed that they understand the language of their opposite numbers. Usually, however, the Ticinese and Rumantsch speakers adapt to the situation by speaking French or German - or, more and more, everyone speaks English.

Swissness
The Swiss themselves are sometimes puzzled about what they have in common apart from their passport, what it is that makes them Swiss. The Swiss say they are held together by the desire to stay united. The general attitude is summed up in the formula "unity, but not uniformity."

The common identity or Swissness has to do with the political system. The Constitution of 1848 gave legal expression to the lessons drawn from Switzerland's history the unity of the state could only be realized by respecting the individuality of the member states. The 26 autonomous cantons enjoy high degree of freedom in their political and administrative autonomy.



Train crossing a bridge in front of the mountain 'Matter Horn' (Canton of Valais).



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Novartis has manufacturing and marketing operation in Bangladesh since 1973 in areas of Research, Off Patent Branded Generic (Sandoz), and OTC Pharmaceuticals, along with Animal Health.

We extend our heartiest felicitations on the National Day of Switzerland

Thank you for making our world more sustainable

The design for a new main station in Stuttgart, Germany, reclaims lost urban space and stimulates social pride through a new urban center that displays aesthetic sensibility and mastery of materials.

3,000 participants from 118 countries submitted sustainable construction projects. The most outstanding were honored in Bangkok with global Holcim Awards. Gold goes to Germany and Venezuela, silver to Italy and bronze to Canada. Congratulations.

The plan for refurbishing San Rafael-Unido in Caracas, Venezuela, not only advances local pride and resourcefulness; it is an ethically responsive and environmentally sensitive approach to sustainably minimizing socioeconomic hardship.

"Waterpower - Renewal Strategy for the Mulini Valley near Amalfi, Italy" is a regional masterplan that renews through sensitive preservation and innovation instead of replacement, beautifully integrating the natural and built environments.

"Greening the Infrastructure at Benny Farm in Montreal, Canada" is a low-cost housing and urban renewal project skillfully designed to incorporate many beneficial technologies for excellent building performance and sustainable efficiency.

The Holcim Awards is a competition of the Holcim Foundation for Sustainable Construction based in Switzerland. The independent Foundation is an initiative of Holcim Ltd, one of the world's leading suppliers of cement and aggregates (crushed stone, sand and gravel) as well as downstream activities such as ready-mix concrete and asphalt including services. The Group holds majority and minority interests in more than 70 countries on all continents.

The next Holcim Awards competition will open for submissions in the second half of 2007. www.holcimawards.org

Winner: Christoph Ingenhoven, Ingenhoven und Partner Architekten, Düsseldorf, Germany

Winners: Silvia Soonets, Isabel Cecilia Pocater, Maria Ines Pocater, Victor Gastier, Proyectos Arqui s CA, Caracas, Venezuela

Winners: Luigi Centola, Centola & Associati, Rome; Mariagiovanna Riitano, University of Salerno, Italy; in cooperation with partners in Italy, Spain, the USA and UK

Winners: Daniel S. Pearl with Mark Poddubniuk and Bernard Olivier, L'OEUF, Montreal, Canada

Holcim Foundation for Sustainable Construction 2006

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