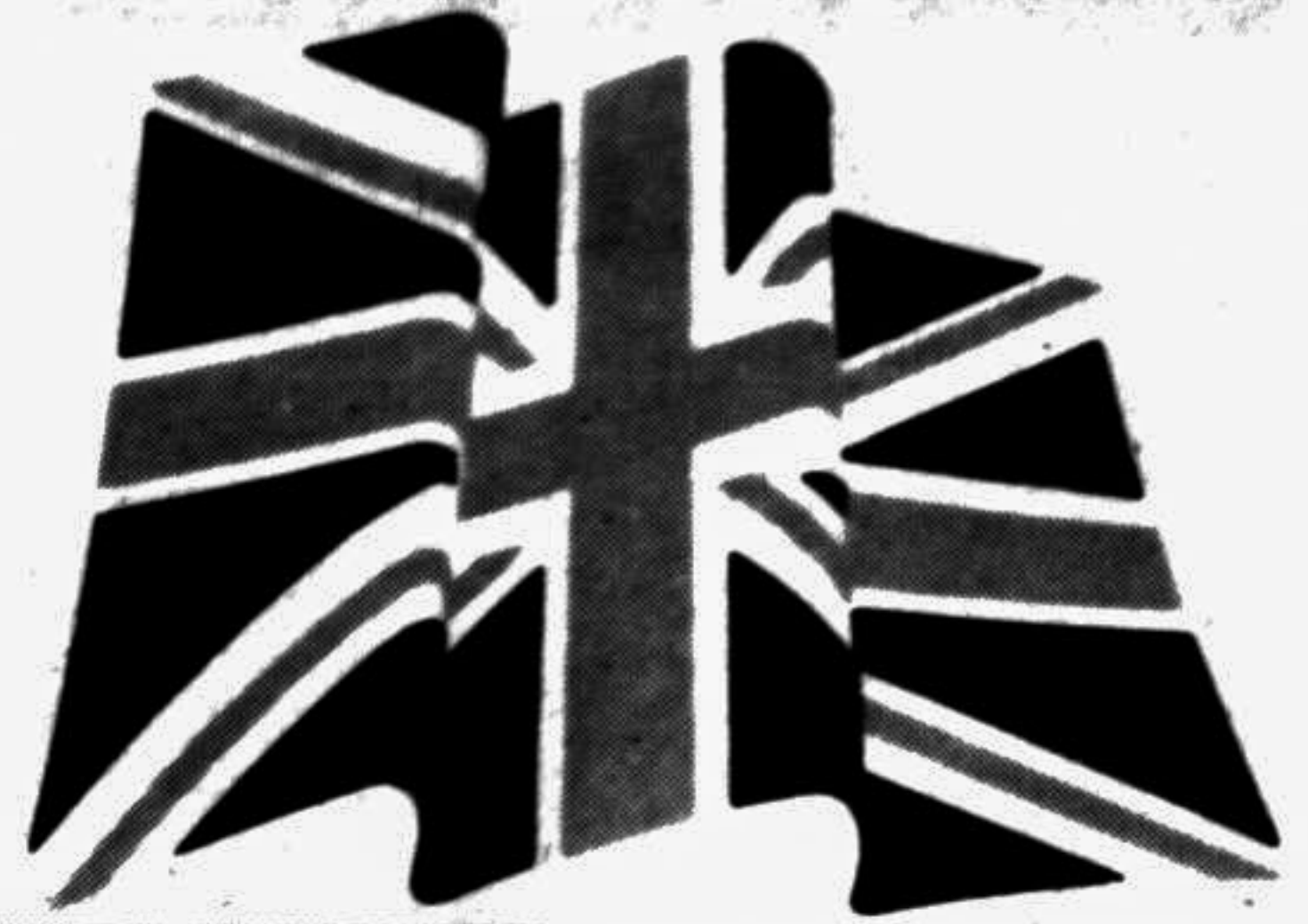




# OFFICIAL BIRTHDAY OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II



The Daily Star 8

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Interview : High Commissioner Imray

## 'Always Looking for Ways to Improve Relations Further'

**B**ANGLADESH has enjoyed an especially close relation with Britain since our emergence as an independent state in 1971. During our War of Liberation, British politicians and other public figures helped immensely to form world public opinion in favour of Bangladesh. Official London stood by Dhaka in the wider international arena, championing our entry into the Commonwealth as well as the United Nations.

Twenty years on, Britain's role in Bangladesh's socio-economic development is more pronounced than ever before. From trade and investment to student scholarships and flood control, Britain makes a significant contribution in a wide range of development activities. In an interview given to Daily Star Assistant Editor Sabir Mustafa, British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Colin Imray talks about the present and future of bilateral relations.

*Daily Star: There are quite a few British business firms operating in Bangladesh at present. Judging by their experience, how do you see the future of business cooperation between Bangladesh and the UK? What are the major obstacles to Bangladesh attracting greater British investment?*

Colin Imray: Business cooperation between Bangladesh

gle foreign investor in Bangladesh.

However, this is not to suggest there are no problems. There has been recent evidence that policy decisions taken by previous administrations have been having an adverse effect on the operation of a number of UK companies here. For instance, there have been difficulties over remittances, as well as apparently arbitrary changes to the inducements that were offered to foreign investors to set up business here. Aspects of the Drugs Policy, increase in the excise duty on tobacco etc. have also contributed to difficulties.

During recent years, there have been some serious obstacles to foreign investment here. The country has been suffering from political instability, and international businessmen shy away from areas where the rule of law is not guaranteed. But, of course, with the establishment of a representative government, there should not be much problem in overcoming that obstacle.

But the problems with labour unrest and the lack of a viable economic and industrial policy remain, and hopefully, the democratic system of government will be able to tackle these problems successfully.

There is another perception which is unfortunately

prospects here before committing any capital. A good report from foreign companies already here would help. And although the local market is large in terms of population, foreign companies are likely to look for export potentials. A British firm, Tootal, has successfully married the two, and doubled its production of threads used by the garment industry for export.

*DS: How effective do you think has the British Council been in promoting cultural ties between Bangladesh and Britain? Could it do more? Is there any scope for expansion in the field of educational assistance such as scholarships?*

CI: It is our view that one of the most effective ways of promoting an enduring understanding between two countries is through a two-way exchange of people. This is looking at culture in its broadest sense. To that end, the British Council, which is responsible for all cultural activities, has been quite effective.

The Council's art activities are increasingly joint ventures with local cultural groups, such as guitar and photography workshops, drama productions and film events. There are plans to arrange, partly with local commercial sponsorship, one music and one drama tour from the UK each year.

Unfortunately, the Council has not been able to carry out



Long may she reign: Queen Elizabeth II

### High Commissioner's Message

**T**oday is the Official Birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Britain's "National Day". The Queen is also Head of the Commonwealth, which gives her a special position in relation to Bangladesh.

Membership of the Commonwealth is a visible link emphasising Britain and Bangladesh's long history of close association. Several hundred years ago our forefathers came as traders to the "Bengal of Gold" of Rabinath Tagore. Britain's relationship with Bangladesh and the other parts of the subcontinent has been transformed from that of imperial power to one of partnership in development.

We have also shared the horror of the devastating cy-

clone which hit Bangladesh on 29 April. Britain's help for the cyclone victims was rapid, and effective. The British Government quickly committed £8 million for emergency relief, and last month I visited the British ship Fort Grange as its helicopter and boats distributed food and medicine to those in need.

There is a fund of goodwill and interest in Britain for Bangladesh, never more evident than now; my Ministers made clear to me in London only last month that we shall continue to work together with Bangladesh in its endeavours for the future.

Bangladesh/British Friendship  
Colin Imray

*CI: At present Britain is mainly involved in energy, agriculture and fisheries, communication including bridge-building though we are not involved with the Jamuna project, health and population projects, the education sector and commodity aid.*

We have already completed a study in the north-west of the country under the UNDP-sponsored Flood Action Plan. If you remember, the Plan was initiated in 1989 following a seminar in London inaugurated by former prime minister Margaret Thatcher, and we think the Plan is a very desirable, long-term thing.

Interestingly, the Plan's coordinator, Jim Dempster who happens to be an Englishman, is now looking into the possibility of integrating it with cyclone and tidal bore protection schemes along the coast.

In the longer-term we plan to shift our attention towards more poverty-focussed projects to encourage the economy to become self-reliant. We are already contributing to the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee's (BRAC) rural credit-creation programme. We will be going more into areas of primary education, health and rural infrastructure.

But we know there is a lot of criticism of donors imposing conditions on recipient countries. But certain conditions will have to be made, because we want to make sure of the best use of the funds, and especially parliament members in donor countries want to know the money is spent. Britain's policy on aid was spelt out clearly by minister for overseas development Lynda Chalker on June 6. She said, "We support countries undertaking reform programmes at the behest of the IMF and the World Bank. We try to ensure that countries receiving our aid respect human rights, respect the rule of law and are accountable to their people". She further said, "Every expenditure proposal must be subject to technical, economic, financial and environmental appraisal. By close monitoring we get the best evaluation and the best use of tax-payer's money".

*DS: What is the present trend in migration from Bangladesh to the UK?*

CI: Each year we receive 5,000 applications for settlement visas, the vast majority of which are applications by the wives and children under 18 of Bangladeshi men resident in the UK. The Bangladeshi population in the UK numbers around 250,000, most of whom emigrated in the 1960s and '70s.

*DS: How are British girls of Bengalee origin wishing to bring non-British husbands to the UK faring under current rules and practices of the Home Office?*

CI: Our immigration rules treat men and women as equals. The rules which permit husbands to join their wives in the UK are the same as those allowing wives to join husbands, provided the spouse can support and accommodate his or her partner.

Of course, if the visa issuing officer here in Dhaka has any reason to suspect that the marriage is one of convenience for immigration purpose only, then he can refuse.

But you must remember that 70 per cent of settlement visa applicants are successful. And, if someone is refused visa, then he or she can appeal to the Adjudicator's court in Britain. The High Commission is duty-bound to forward all papers and statements to the Adjudicator who will then interview the applicant's sponsor in Britain before reaching a verdict. The appellant's sponsor can get legal help free of cost. All this costs the British government a lot of money, and this right of appeal is quite unique.

*DS: How do you see the future of Bangladesh-British relations developing?*

CI: Relations are good, but they cannot always be taken for granted. Each channel has to be nurtured and taken care of. Recently, the Department of Trade and Industry in Britain offered to help Bangladesh with getting more British firms to invest here. In my recent visit to London I lobbied strongly with the government on behalf of Bangladesh. It is my job to try and find ways on how relations can be further improved, and we are always looking for ways to add to the existing good relations.

The Queen

## A British Institution

By Hugo Vickers

**Q**UEEN Elizabeth II has earned universal respect by her unflinching devotion to duty. For nearly 40 years she has attended daily to her state boxes and is well read and informed on matters relating to Britain and those Commonwealth countries of which she is also Queen.

Those who are received in audience have learned the need to be well informed themselves, as the Queen expects constructive answers to her questions.

Now 65 years old, the Queen has the considerable advantage of experience over her ministers. Her first prime minister, Sir Winston Churchill, was born in 1874. It is extraordinary to realise that her present prime minister, John Major, was a boy of seven when she came to the throne.

She has a large family around her, including four children, and several grandchildren. She can still call on the advice of her mother, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, a sprightly 90-year-old, who has been fulfilling royal engagements since 1923.

The Queen was always a serious character, even as a small girl. She possesses a youthful enthusiasm, combined with a sense of authority, a good judgement of right and wrong, and a wish to inform, this inclination being linked with a certain expectation that her

listener will note and remember what she has said.

When she became Queen, she was only 25 years of age, and already married for four years, with two small children, Charles, the Prince of Wales, and Anne, now the Princess Royal. Having travelled abroad and lived through World War II, she was already leading a more grown-up life than the average 25-year-old.

A particular interest as monarch has been the promotion of the Commonwealth, and her devotion to that family of nations has done as much as anything else to hold it together. She has now travelled to all the Commonwealth countries and makes a point of hosting the Commonwealth conferences, at which she will give an audience to each of the prime ministers in turn.

She has brought her own personal style to the monarchy, and it was on her insistence that, on tours, at home and abroad, the Royal walkabout was introduced, she wanted to meet more ordinary people informally.

### Busy Programme

The Queen's annual engagements are extensive. Besides attending to state papers, she receives a great number of people in audience.

Regular state occasions include the State Opening of Parliament, the Queen's Birthday Parade (Trooping the

Colour), and the Remembrance Day Service. She also has a busy programme of visits throughout the year to all parts of Britain, in addition to her overseas trips.

All these engagements involve briefing and preparation behind the scenes, so it is no wonder the Queen is at her desk each day by 0930 hours. It has been said that much of the Queen's popularity can be attributed to the steadfast manner in which she carries out her duties.

There is never any lifting of the sovereign's daily burden, but the Queen understands this, and would have it no other way. Those who talk of abdication should remember that she is an anointed Queen, and as such expects to reign until death.

Besides, her influence and experience as a constitutional monarch only increase with the passing of the years. Many of the problems confronting a new prime minister will be far from new to her.

In the Queen's character there is a charming contradiction. As a person, she is modest and unassuming, genuinely surprised, for example, to find a large crowd still waiting for her if her flight is hours delayed. On the other hand, as monarch, she is always aware that she represents her nation, which she does with resolve and without any qualms or self-doubt.



At work: High Commissioner Imray (left) handing over cheque for cyclone relief

and the UK is good and the British companies with investment here have done much to foster the excellent relationship between our two countries. Originally investment from the UK was concentrated on the tea estates, but this is now widely diversified with British companies operating in various sectors such as manufacturing, consultancy, contracting and services. Currently there are some 37 British firms operating here with total investment of approximately £40 million, making Britain the largest sin-

true, that Bangladesh is a disaster-prone country. The devastating impact of the recent tidal bore on the Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) is an example of how natural causes can adversely affect foreign investment. Adequate protection for the CEPZ is now essential to reassure foreign investors, or the Zone might even have to be moved to a less-exposed area.

It is important for Bangladesh to make sure existing ventures are successful, because new investors would naturally enquire about

all its plans in this area because of the civil unrest over the part few years. Events would normally be held in the auditorium in Dhaka, which was totally refurbished and equipped with modern stage and lighting in August, 1990. It was not possible to mount any significant public events there because of the recent history of violence in the locality. However, the Council did keep itself open, even during the Emergency of last year, in order to allow students to take their external exams.

I think the Council is providing a useful service to students and teachers through the provisions of books, journals, audio/visual materials and an education service in each of its libraries in Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi. These libraries are not only open to students, but also to the general public. There is scope for opening new libraries in this country, but unfortunately the fund is not available at present.

A great deal of money is already being spent on post-graduate fellowships by the British government. About 300 scholarships, funded by the Overseas Development Agency (ODA), are administered by the Council; the Council itself offers some 25 fellowships and visitorships each year, as well as administering a further 100 fellowships each year on behalf of FCO, Commonwealth Awards, the UN etc.

*DS: In what areas of the development process in Bangladesh is Britain currently involved? What is the current thinking in Britain concerning aid?*



Helping hand: Royal Navy Sea King from Fort Grange at Cox's Bazar

## History of Stable Government

**H**ENRY David Thoreau, the 19th-century American thinker, once said the British constitution was framed in after-dinner conversations over the wine. Although obviously not a statement of fact, Thoreau's analysis amusingly reflects the way in which Britain's constitution has evolved informally, almost casually, not being enshrined in any single document.

This constitution, formed partly by statute, partly by common law, and partly by convention and precedent, has adapted well through the centuries to meet the needs of an open parliamentary democracy with a sovereign as head of State. The role of the monarch, though largely that of a figurehead, is to provide a visible unifying and cohesive force to which all citizens as respond, especially at times of national crisis or rejoicing.

Parliament is the supreme legislative authority. The upper house, the House of Lords, consists of hereditary lords and ladies, a number of eminent law officers and senior bishops, and life peers and peeresses.

The lower house, the House of Commons, with 650 members elected by universal adult suffrage, has for years been reported in the national press, but with radio and now television allowed to broadcast from within the chamber the public at large gets a vivid picture of how issues are debated and

forming the members are performing.

The party political system has existed in its present form since the 18th century, and for most of that time has involved a rivalry between two main schools of thought. For years it was mainly a contest between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party; nowadays, it is principally the Conservatives and the Labour party, with the Liberal Democrats representing a smaller but significant third force, and a number of other parties, including Welsh and Scottish nationalists, with a handful of seats in the House.

### No Conflict of Interests

The sovereign appoints the prime minister, and by convention appoints the leader of the party that commands a majority of members in the House of Commons to form a government. The prime minister then selects ministers to run the various departments of state and sit in the Cabinet, the government's main policy determining body, though the exercise of its functions depends on majority support in the House of Commons.

On assuming office, a minister must resign any commercial directorships he holds, and so order his personal affairs that there is no conflict between public duties and private interests.

As well as bringing up matters in the House, MPs have other ways of keeping an eye on what the government is do-

ing. A number of standing committees of MPs considers Bills as they come forward.

A different procedure is adopted by the special, or select, committees that investigate aspects of specific subjects and take written and oral evidence from whoever they care to call. Interested bodies and individuals are obviously willing to appear before such committees, but senior civil servants and even ministers are also called, upon to appear and be questioned.

Parliamentary democracy is made, to work by having the spotlight constantly turned on it. At question time, four times a week, ministers answer MPs' queries, and twice a week it is the prime minister's turn to do so. The main opposition party and the next largest are given a quota of days on which they can choose the subjects for debate. There are special periods when individual members can raise issues that concern them.

Britain's judiciary is independent of the government and is not subject to ministerial direction or control. Judges, especially those who have made lively comments during their years in court, are, when they retire, frequent participants in television interviews on matters great and trivial, having learnt a lot about life and people.

One way and another, the long history of stable government in Britain is continued.

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