



# CANADA DAY



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Interview : High Commissioner Emile Gauvreau

## 'The Future of Bilateral Relations Looks Great'

CANADA had already celebrated its hundredth anniversary of statehood by the time Bangladesh was born as an independent and sovereign nation in 1971. Over the past 20 years, Bangladesh-Canada ties have expanded to cover a wide range of areas. Today, Canada is one of Bangladesh's most important development partners; trade and business relations have developed steadily, and human contacts are on the rise. Bilateral relations, based on mutual respect, have matured inexorably and, as Canadian High Commissioner to Bangladesh EMILE GAUVREAU explains to Daily Star Assistant Editor SABIR MUSTAFA, their potentials are far from exhausted:

*Daily Star: Canada is involved in a wide range of development activities in Bangladesh through its aid programme. But what is the level of business cooperation between the two countries? Is there much in the way of investment and joint ventures in this country?*

Emile Gauvreau: Bangladesh is not known very well in Canada, and the Canadian business community does not know Bangladesh very well. So on that side we can say there is a lot of work to be done. I think the largest Canadian private investment in Bangladesh is Bata, which is significant. The reason I say that is because Bata is very important for the economic development of Bangladesh. Bata is not a company which is exporting, it is a company which is producing for the local market. It really satisfies the needs of the people. This is what is important, in my mind, for the future development of Bangladesh. Export-oriented companies are important to generate some foreign exchange. But I think that if you want to develop the Bangladesh economy you will have to develop industries that will satisfy the Bangladesh market.

That's one point. Now the second point is we have a very

important joint venture between Mittal, which is now a British company but it was a Canadian company when the venture was launched, and Gulf Bangladesh Associates. They are assembling PABX equipment, and from here they are supplying regional markets. They are also in the process of equipping all the rural areas of Bangladesh with PABX equipment. So the technology is transferred here, and it is assembled to serve the Bangladesh market.

This is what I like. But it is very difficult to find companies that will come here and find their niche to really develop the local market. To come here and join the export business, well, I think anyone can do it. You just come, set up your business in the export processing zone, you've got cheap labour, you just add a few extra value to your product and you just export it. But I think if you look at the future, what we'd like to do is bring in companies from Canada to establish industries that will generate economic activities in Bangladesh. That is what we are working on and one sector that we would like to work on is the energy sector.

Bangladesh does not have much natural resources, but it has one very big one — gas. So, if you start to develop the gas sector you have all sort of industries which will grow around the gas industry. You have the gas pipeline, management of gas pipeline, you have manufacturing of gas meters, gas stoves, gas fridges, all sorts of things. This is what is important for the market, and then people will say, yes, Bangladesh is economically doing better.

This is one sector we are looking at and we are waiting for the new investment policy from the government. We really hope that they will open up the gas sector to private investment.

*DS: When you say you are looking to work in the gas sector, do you mean actually extracting gas, or involvement in gas-related products?*



Gauvreau : Optimistic

EG: Canada has been very much involved in the energy sector. We had one company here under contract from CIDA which dug, I think, 12 wells for Petrobrangia and found tremendous reserves of gas, in the order of 20 trillion cubic feet of gas. So what we are saying to the government is that on 20 trillion cu. ft. of gas, you can go out on the market and borrow money on that rich potential. Then you can extract to serve your domestic market and also think in terms of exporting.

Gas has tremendous potential, but it needs a decision from the government to open up that sector to private investment which is not allowed at the moment.

For the exploitation of gas, the government should be very much involved. This is a national resource, and Bangladesh has few natural resources, the government would like to keep control over the exploitation of its natural resources. So, if the government of Bangladesh enters into joint venture with the local private sector, and goes out to attract foreign investment, then you will be able to find a lot of money in the market. But the Bangladesh private sector itself does not have the money to invest and take all the risk in this sector. But if you have a good product a lot of people will be interested. So the private sector could go with the government and attract money from foreign companies and

foreign banks. But one single party could not do it.

*DS: At the moment, is there much being done by the government or the private sector here to attract cooperation from Canadian businesses?*

EG: Yes, there have been many missions in the past year to Canada to meet with the Canadian private sector. Seminars were organised on opportunities of investment in Bangladesh. Some contacts are going on at the moment between local people and the Canadian business community. But it takes time.

But it's not easy. As I said, the Canadians don't know the Bangladesh market and the Bangladeshis don't know the Canadian market very well. It may be a little far from both sides to meet at a certain point. But my question to the Bangladeshis is, what do you have to offer to the Canadian private sector which will make them choose Bangladesh instead of another place for making an investment. When they travel to Canada to meet the Canadian businessmen, this is what they have to bring with them. What they have to offer which is better than their competitors in the region, such as Thailand, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia. Private companies want to make profit. So if there is money to be made, they will go.

*DS: Garments is the single most important item Bangladesh exports to Canada. Does Canada have quotas for garment imports from Bangladesh?*

EG: Yes, we do have quotas. Because we have a textile industry in Canada also which is suffering! It is in bad shape. So unfortunately we have quotas. As High Commissioner to Bangladesh, I am fighting everyday with my government to try to increase the quotas. And I must say we have succeeded in raising the quotas in the last three years. At one point, in fact last year, the garment industry could not fill up 100 per cent of their quotas for exports to Canada. But that is because the garment industry here has its clients too, and it takes a long time to negotiate with their clients to increase export quantities and things like that. So it is not possible to fill up the quota immediately after an increase. But we are making progress. Immediately when there is an opening, the Bangladeshis are there. This is something I have found out here — the Bangladeshis are some of the best entrepreneurs of the world. They are very good entrepreneurs.

*DS: Talking about Bangladeshis being there, what is the current trend in migration from Bangladesh to Canada? Are they all educated qualified people, or are they unskilled labour?*

EG: You have to look at it from two angles. The first one is the immigration programme. The people who apply to emigrate to Canada are usually very highly educated people and most of them qualify for Canadian immigration. We don't have many people turned down in our immigration programme. Ok, it takes time. It takes about two years to go through the whole process, but most of the people qualify for immigration to Canada because they know before applying what the basic criteria are. The second part is visitor visas for which I'd say not more than five per cent people qualify. The bonafide tourist or visitors who normally get visas are people who know Canada, who know the North American continent, who have travelled before, who are well-established people here and so there is no problem.

*DS: What rules do you have for people who are settled in Canada but wish to bring their families over from Bangladesh?*

EG: Yes, this is one of the priorities of our immigration programme — family reunion. It is the priority. And there is even a separate channel to

### Canada Day Message

Today, Canada celebrates the 124th anniversary of its nationhood. It gives me great pleasure to share this celebration with the people of Bangladesh, a country with which Canada enjoys a history of warm friendship and cooperation. As fellow members of the Commonwealth, we share a rich heritage of traditions and common attitudes. Our two countries have a history of working constructively together towards pragmatic, realistic objectives in international organisations.

The human link is perhaps the most important of all. There is now a community of more than 8,000 Canadians of Bangladeshi origin. These people are widely distributed throughout Canada and make an industrious and creative contribution to Canadian life. A number of Bangladesh students are pursuing courses at Canadian universities, frequently on Commonwealth Scholarships or with CIDA support. Links between Canadian and Bangladeshi academic institutions continue to expand. There is also a community of more than 300 Canadians living in Bangladesh — most of them involved in one form or another with the development assistance programme.

Indeed, the ties that bind our two countries are strong. However, there is much that can be achieved by working together even more closely in future years, in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Canada looks forward to the continued strengthening of our warm and productive relationship in the year ahead.

— High Commissioner Emile Gauvreau

process the requests to reunite families.

*DS: Does CIDA have any specific area on which it concentrates in its development work in Bangladesh?*

EG: Oh yes, it has. Agriculture is very important to us. We are very much involved in the development of rural poor programmes, and we are going more and more for rural development. We are one of the financiers of the Grameen Bank, and we are also one of the co-founders of the BRAC Bank which will start very soon.

We are very much involved in the railways, very much. We have been involved for 10 years now, and for at least the next 10 years we will be involved in the training of the maintenance people, development of the workshops in the railways, mainly in Chittagong, Dhaka and Parbatipur.

We are providing cables, poles, equipment. But we rely completely on the REB to implement their programmes. And they are doing well. We are very satisfied with that collaboration. The way the REB is organised in cooperatives in different regions of the country is working well. When the Board meets you can be sure the people are paying their bills, and if they don't get after them! It is controlled by the people. It is the way it should work.

The important thing is to involve the people in the management of the business. When you are in rural areas and you get people, even uneducated people to sit around a table and express their views, it works. The people may not be educated, but they have a great deal of commonsense. And they know that if somebody doesn't pay his bills, then may be they won't have any elec-



Canadian heritage : Native Indian art

## A Woman's Rightful Place

WOMEN have a long history of active involvement in all aspects of Canadian life. In 1921, after a long struggle, they won the right to vote. In 1929, they overturned a previous court ruling that barred women from key government positions on the grounds that they were not "persons" within the meaning of the law.

There have been remarkable changes to society and the lives of Canadian women since then. When the 1929 "Persons Case" was decided, less than 4 per cent of married women worked outside their homes; in 1988, more than 59 per cent were in the labour force. That trend alone has meant considerable changes in family life.

The past 25 years have seen the demise of the "traditional" family, with father the only breadwinner and mother working unpaid in the home, looking after the children and shouldering the responsibility

for household tasks. Many families find they can no longer manage on one income. By the time of the 1986 Census, only 12 per cent of all Canadian families were husband-and-wife families supported by the income of the husband alone.

The predominant family type is now the two-earner couple, with or without children. And there are now more single-parent families — most of them headed by women — than there are "traditional" families.

Separation or divorce is still the main reason women are left alone with the children, but almost one-quarter of younger women who are single parents have never been in any kind of marriage or common-law relationship.

Perhaps the most remarkable change in recent years has been the increased number of mothers who have young children and work outside their homes. A record 61 per cent

of mothers in two-parent families with children under three, where the father is employed, are now in the paid labour force. And, contrary to public perception, most mothers who work outside their homes when their children are very young have full-time jobs.

Not surprisingly, these rapid changes in family life have focused attention on child care and leave for workers with family responsibilities. All jurisdictions in Canada give women a statutory right to take maternity leave without penalty — usually for a period of 17 weeks. An additional period of 24 weeks' parental leave, which may be taken by either parent, is available to the 10 per cent of workers who fall under federal jurisdiction — mostly in banks, transportation and communications companies, as well as the federal public service.

While these rights are for

(Continued on facing page)

tricity in few years from now. So they make sure it works. When you de-centralise and when you trust the peoples, it works. The people have a stake in it, and that's why the Rural Electrification Board works.

*DS: What is the current situation in Canada in relation to Quebec, with Brian Mulroney working out a new accord ...*

EG: Yes, there is a lot of discussion going on right now. Canada is going through a very important and crucial period in terms of constitutional development. As you know last year we were close to reaching an agreement called the Meech Lake Accord, but it collapsed in the last minute. Since then prime minister Mulroney has launched a very extensive consultation with the Canadian population on what do we want to do with our country. We have established what they call a Citizen's Forum which has tabled its report the day before Canada Day, to the Canadian parliament. There are some proposals in it to redefine the political relationship between the federal government and the 10 provinces, taking into account that in Canada we have two cultures. We have the French culture and the English culture. But we also have other important cultures. There is the native Indian culture. We also have lot of immigrants. In Toronto we have the second-longest Chinese community outside China. We now have to find a way to

integrate all those people around some constitutional arrangements, that each region of Canada will be able to develop its own society and its own culture, worth the respect of all the other provinces. This is why the Citizen's Forum recommendations will be very important.

*DS: Looking at it from a pessimistic point of view, if the Forum's workings do not come up to Quebec's expectations, would they go for what they have called sovereignty? And what is this sovereignty anyway?*

EG: It all depends on what you mean by sovereignty. You can be a sovereign part of a bigger entity. What Quebec really wants is a way to protect the French culture. And they are not asking for very much. They want to have the power, the authority, to define the programmes and the policies to protect the French culture, in the context of the American continent and not only Canada. Quebec is a very important part of Canada and all the Canadians realise that. The Quebecois also realise that other people of Canada are very important for the development of Quebec. Now we are at the juncture of finding ways to bring all those people to work together. And you have to do that with respect for the sovereignties of the cultures. In my mind, the sovereignty of the French culture and the sovereignty of the English culture are the base on which the

people will build the new constitutional agreement in Canada. After 124 years we are still discussing, that means there is still hope. So I am very optimistic.

*DS: How optimistic are you about the future of Bangladesh-Canada relations?*

EG: Our relations have developed over the past 20 years, and Bangladesh today is the largest recipient of Canadian aid in the world. So, when Bangladesh has reached that position, it's not because it did not have anything to offer. Our relation is based on respect for mutual interest. I must say there is a lot of respect for the Bangladesh people from the Canadian people.

There are a lot of problems. The Canadians are very keen to develop that sort of partnership that will make them understand and know Bangladesh better. We have a lot in common and we also have a lot to share. This is how I see the future — we will share more and more. And with what is happening in Bangladesh in the political field we feel we can become even bigger partner in the future development of the country. The challenges will be very difficult, but the future looks great.

*DS: Thank you High Commissioner Gauvreau, for your time.*

## BROADWAY

BEST WISHES TO THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF CANADA ON CANADA DAY

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