

Economic Relations between the Netherlands and Bangladesh

BANGLADESH and the Netherlands have always enjoyed excellent relations. Previously it had been more focused on development cooperation, though less importance was given to the development of commercial ties. However, as Bangladesh opens up her economy and becomes more capable of competing internationally, there has been a significant shift in the trade patterns between the two countries. During the 1980's the trade balance was in favour of the Netherlands, but in the 1990's this has been reversed and the balance is now strongly in Bangladesh's favour.

The trade trend between Bangladesh and the Netherlands, and the major trading partners of Bangladesh are shown in the tables below. These figures clearly indicate the strong trade ties between the two countries. The private sector has started to bloom into the dominant sector of the Bangladeshi economy, bringing with it the fruits of healthy competition. Once starved for capital and entrepreneurial skills, Bangladesh has seen the level of investment gradually increase in recent years. The growing cadre of skilled entrepreneurs has played a significant role in bringing about this metamorphosis. Their professionalism has meant that Bangladeshi firms are gradually learning to be competitive and efficient, producing greater volumes of quality goods and services. On the other hand, Dutch companies have upgraded themselves to the more sophisticated industries and services over the last two decades.

This has meant higher average wages and obsolescence of

some of the less advanced and more labour intensive industries. As a result, products like garments, textiles, leather goods, toys, etc. have become costly to produce in the Netherlands. At the same time Bangladesh has gradually consolidated her position in the

production of these items by expanding the production base, improving quality, and reducing costs. This has meant that exports from Bangladesh to the Netherlands have surged during the last decade. However, Dutch exports to Bangladesh have not matched this pace as the

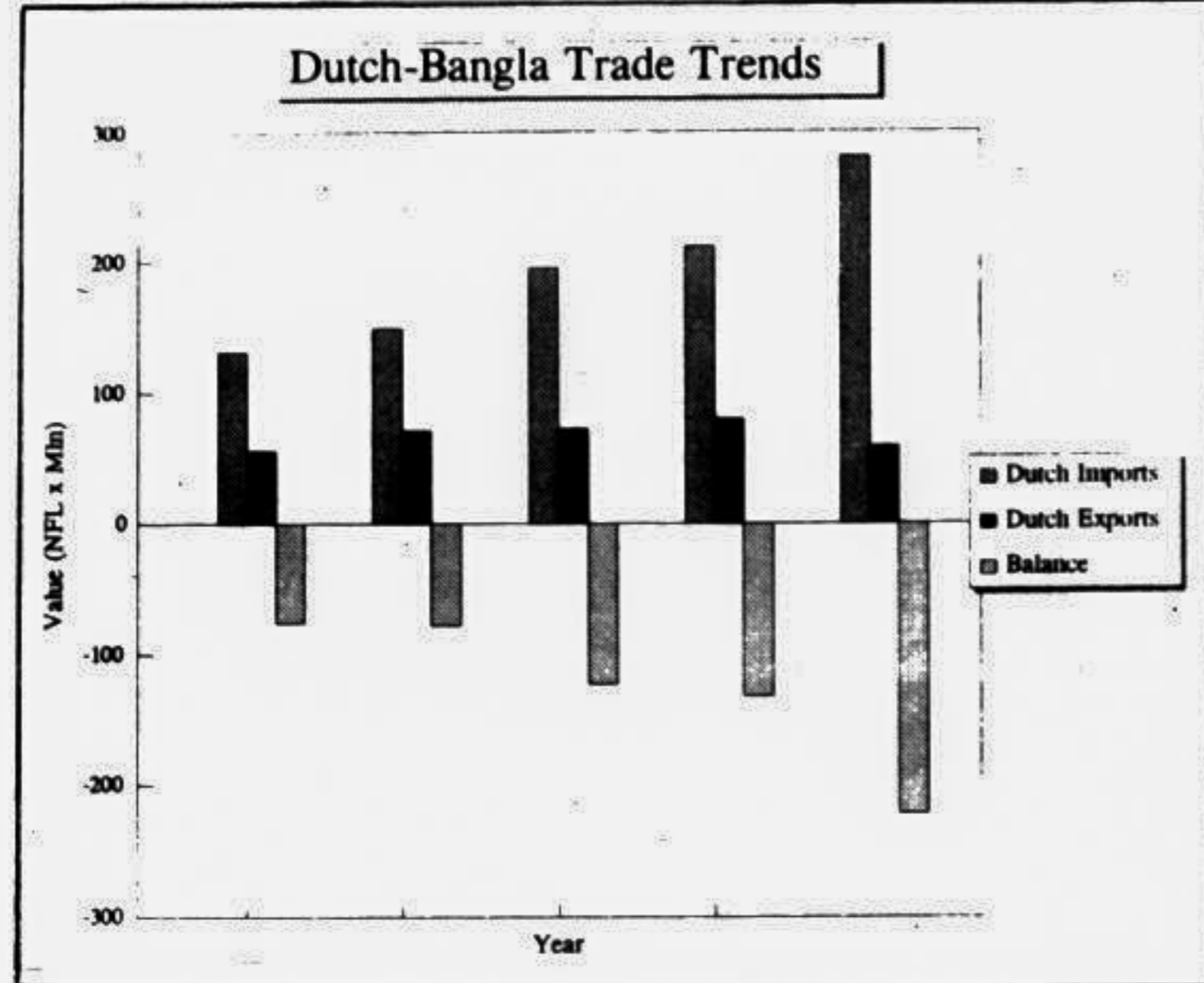
Netherlands is perceived by Bangladeshis as a relatively costly source for imports. To some extent, the Dutch tendency to keep a low profile has meant lack of awareness among Bangladeshi businessmen of what the Netherlands can offer. But contrary to popular belief,

promotion campaigns, etc. in the years ahead.

Note: The Embassy maintains a Netherlands-Bangladesh Business Directory which is regularly updated. On the auspicious occasion of Queen's Day, we would like to invite all Dutch businesses or their representatives in Bangladesh, who have not yet registered with the Embassy, to do so at their earliest convenience.

Following are Netherlands-Bangladesh trade trends from 1992 to 1996

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Dutch Imports	131.8	149.0	195.3	212.0	280.7
Dutch Exports	55.9	71.2	72.8	80.1	59.0
Balance	-75.9	-77.8	-122.5	-131.9	-221.7



Notes: a) Values are in million guilders (US\$ 1.00 = NFL 2.03)
b) Periods are from Jan 01 to Dec 31 of each year.
c) Figures show Dutch imports and exports with Bangladesh.

Dutch Exports to Bangladesh:

Item	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Food & live animals	24.2	26.8	14.7	16.7	9.8
Beverages & tobacco	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.6	1.0
Mineral fuels, lubricants, others	0.1	0.2	0.5	0.4	1.1
Animal & vegetable oils & fats	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.1	0.0
Chemicals	15.3	17.9	29.4	25.6	20.7
Manufactured goods	4.6	8.4	4.7	6.1	8.6
Machinery & transport equipment	9.5	15.6	18.8	29.8	14.8
Miscellaneous manufactures	1.6	1.9	2.6	0.8	3.0
Total	55.9	71.2	72.8	80.1	59.0

Dutch Imports from Bangladesh:

Item	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Food & live animals	9.6	9.5	21.3	28.4	27.7
Manufactured goods	28.2	22.0	15.4	15.2	26.8
Miscellaneous manufactures	94.0	117.5	158.6	168.4	226.2
Total	131.8	149.0	195.3	212.0	280.7

Notes: a) Figures in million guilders (US\$ 1.00 = NFL 2.03)
b) Periods are from Jan 01 to Dec 31 of each year.

Exports from Bangladesh:

Rank	Group	Country	Tk. (Mn.)		US\$ (Mn.)	
			1995-96	1996-96	1995-96	1996-96
		USA	38,144.1		908.2	
1	EU	UK	14,102.5		335.8	
2	EU	Germany	12,862.9		306.3	
4	EU	France	8,631.6		205.5	
5	EU	Italy	6,823.5		162.5	
6	EU	Netherlands	6,178.9		147.1	
7	EU	Belgium	5,799.5		138.1	
8		Japan	4,596.6		109.4	
9		Hong Kong	4,445.5		105.8	
10		Canada	2,727.5		64.9	

The Netherlands can offer a wide range of goods and services, at very competitive prices, which are ideally suited for Bangladesh's needs.

The Netherlands has long been a leader in water resources management and technology. Like the Netherlands, Bangladesh is also mostly low lying plains, criss-crossed with rivers and canals, and there is ample scope for adapting Dutch technology and expertise to her needs. In fact the largest single component of the Jamuna Bridge Project, the river training works, was awarded to a Dutch company. Flood control, dredging, and irrigation are also major fields of cooperation. The Netherlands will be a major partner in the Goral restoration project.

The Netherlands has a long tradition as a sea-faring nation. Shipbuilding and repair, especially of smaller river-craft could be a key area for cooperation between the two countries. Dutch technology in shipbuilding is of the highest rating. The Dutch port of Rotterdam is the busiest port in the world and also one of the best managed. This huge experience in port development and management could be used to develop the vital port of Chittagong. Farming methods in the Netherlands are very advanced and highly intensive methods are used. This is because, like Bangladesh, the Netherlands also has an acute shortage of land. It may be mentioned here that the Netherlands has the highest population density in Europe. Bangladesh can surely benefit by sharing experiences in agricultural production.

Not only can the Netherlands offer a wide range of processed foods, but she can also offer farming technology and a large market for horticultural goods.

The chemicals industry is also very strong in the Netherlands and can offer a wide range of pharmaceutical and industrial chemicals, not to mention the plants, equipment, and expertise for setting up chemical factories.

The well developed manufacturing sector in the Netherlands can offer a wide range of industrial and consumer goods. Like Bangladesh, the Netherlands also lacks abundant natural resources. However, she does have large reserves of natural gas. In the opinion of most experts, Bangladesh also should have huge reserves of natural gas in addition to the already discovered significant quantities being produced in several gas fields. The Netherlands is well placed with expertise and equipment, to participate in the development of hydrocarbon resources in Bangladesh.

The Netherlands also has a large pool of experts who can offer their expertise in a wide range of fields. Already there are several dredging and water related companies working in Bangladesh. There are also a large number of Dutch consulting firms working in Bangladesh providing expertise in various fields.

Several internationally reputed Dutch companies have operations in Bangladesh, in addition to numerous smaller ones. The corporate structure of these companies vary from wholly Dutch owned to minor Dutch partnership. There are joint ventures with the government and with the private sector. The nature of their operations include manufacturing, services, development, and trade. These operations cover a wide range of goods and services like pharmaceuticals, chemicals, garments, petroleum, power, dredging, shipbuilding, construction, resource development, foods & edible oils, agricultural seeds, consultancy, finance, and many more.

As the commercial ties expand and become stronger, we will surely see more and more Dutch firms come of Bangladesh. We can look forward to a boost in relations through the interaction of various organizations and their participation in trade fairs.

Please contact the Economic and Commercial Section, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Dhaka.



MESSAGE

A very surprising experience during the first months of my stay in Bangladesh was being introduced to its National Anthem. This piece of music is a poetic expression of love for the landscape, for nature and for the common people who live amidst that landscape and nature. The melody of this hymn, the character of its music, does not express the slightest aggression, nor does it contain any threat or menace. It has the gentle and good-natured character of a waltz or a minuet. In short: it is a national hymn that symbolises and reflects the kindness, gentleness and spontaneity of the Bangladeshi people and the particular beauty of the landscape.

This national anthem, in its tune and in its lyrics, differs contrastingly from the usual national anthems. In many countries national anthems express a fighting spirit; preparedness to lift the sword against anybody who ventures to threaten the integrity of the nation. The merits of that nation itself and of its people, are rarely mentioned. Most of these anthems are composed in the tone of a military march and for that reason lack any expression of gentleness and poetry.

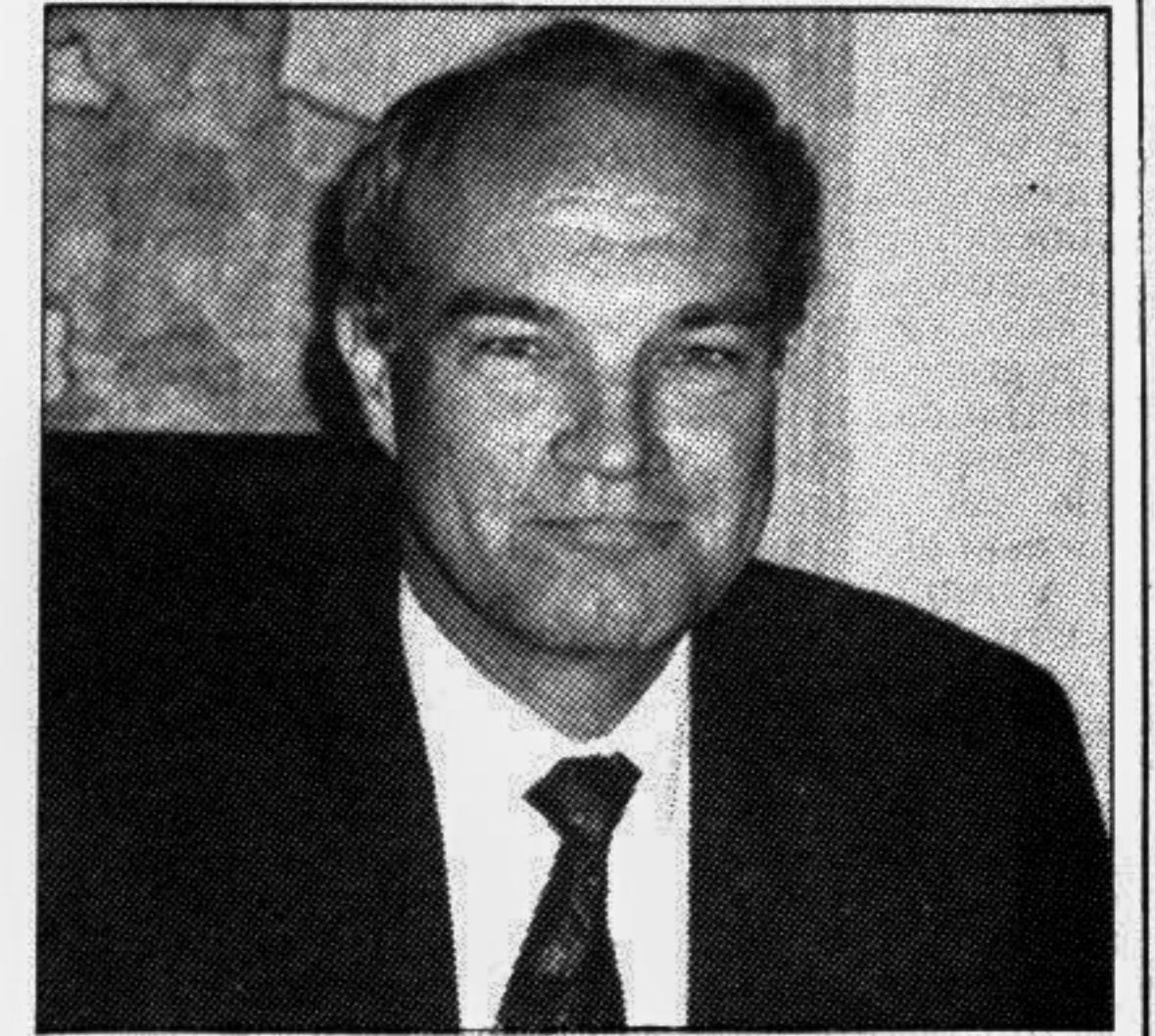
The national hymn of The Netherlands is completely different in nature, but, in a way, just as extraordinary as that of Bangladesh. It was composed in the 16th century, when The Netherlands were part of the Habsburg empire under the Spanish monarch Philip II. Prince William of Orange, a nobleman of German and French origin, after having been appointed by Philip II as Governor of the Netherlands and Flemish parts of the empire, took sympathy for the popular revolt against the absolute and oppressive politics of the Spanish king. In doing so, William became the leader of Dutch revolt against tyranny and religious persecution. The poem describes the Prince as a person who has always been respectful and loyal towards his lawful sovereign (the king of Spain), as a person who reminds his followers of their duty to obey God, but at the same time as a person who respects the values of personal freedom and social justice and for that reason expresses his sincerity and determination to rise against the suppression by the Monarch, "... and drive the plagues that try us and tyranny away."

The melody of the "Wilhelmus" does not reflect any soldierly spirit, but it is solemn and calm. It expresses patience but at the same time confidence and self-awareness.

The European Union recently decided to have its own "EU-Hymn". After some deliberation the choice was made: the final choir of Beethoven's

9th Symphony "Ode to the Joy" was selected. Without any doubt a very humane and noble text: "All people will be brothers", accompanied by masterly music. I think it was an excellent choice. If however, this impressive work of Beethoven would never have been composed, I think the Netherlands national anthem would have been a very good alternative to be chosen as the new European anthem, because it is a very European hymn indeed. Every time the Netherlands national soccer-team plays an official match, thousands of orange-clad spectators in the stadium, peculiarly, sing their tribute to a person of German-French origin who expresses his loyalty to the King of Spain. And they sing about universal human rights: freedom from oppression and freedom of religion on an equal footing. And today, when we celebrate the birthday of the Queen, the same happens in front of most Dutch town-halls.

Beautiful as both the national anthems of Bangladesh and The Netherlands may be, I believe that nobody could object if in the long run, on a global scale, the idea of "All people will be brothers" would prevail and its melody would be more widely heard. It could become the global anthem which could gradually make all other anthems irrelevant.



Dick CB den Haas
Ambassador of The Netherlands to Bangladesh

Koninginnedag

Koninginnedag is a Dutch national holiday to celebrate the head of state's official birthday.

Koninginnedag has been celebrated in the Netherlands since 31 August 1891, when Queen Wilhelmina (1880-1962) celebrated her first birthday as Queen. Since this day also fell at the end of the school holidays, 31 August soon became a holiday for all Dutch schoolchildren. However, it was not yet a national holiday. The Royal Family did not usually attend any of the festivities held throughout the country on that day, although exceptions were sometimes made, as on Queen Wilhelmina's 50th birthday in 1930.

The Queen Mother, Emma (1858-1934), would spend the summer at Soestdijk Palace in Baarn, and every year the inhabitants of Baarn would bring her a floral tribute on her birthday (2 August). After 1937, Princess Juliana (b. 1909) took over this tradition on her birthday, 30 April. When she came to the throne in 1948, 30 April became Koninginnedag. Over the years the floral tribute grew from a parade into a national celebration. The coverage of the festivities on Dutch television from the mid-1950s did much to increase the popularity of Koninginnedag.

During the reign of Queen Juliana (1948-1980) it gradually became a tradition for everyone to be given a day off work, eventually making 30 April a real public holiday. On 24 April 1980 a Royal Decree was issued stating that this day would henceforth be officially known as Koninginnedag, as had long been the custom. It was also decided that, if 30 April were to fall on a Sunday, the Queen's birthday would be celebrated on an earlier day.

When Queen Beatrix (b. 1938) succeeded to the throne on 30 April 1980, it was decided that 30 April would be kept as Koninginnedag. In her coronation address, the Queen announced that this should be regarded as a mark of respect for her mother. Her own birthday, 31 January, would be celebrated privately. Queen Beatrix attends the festivities each year in one or two places (which vary from year to year). She is generally accompanied by her husband, HRH Prince Claus, and other members of the Royal Family. Various events, such as fairs, sports days, children's parties and flea markets are held throughout the country, many of them organised by the local Oranjeverenigingen (associations of supporters of the Royal Family).

Heartiest Felicitations to Her Majesty the Queen On the Occasion of her Birthday

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