



Queen's Day

National Day of the Netherlands



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MESSAGE

Bangladesh and The Netherlands share a great number of characteristics. Both countries are engaged in a never-ending battle against water floods. Both countries are relatively small as compared to their sizeable and powerful neighbouring countries. It may therefore be useful and interesting for me to provide you with a short background on how relations between the Netherlands, a relatively small country, and its considerably larger neighbour Germany have developed over the past decades.

It was only two weeks after Germany's capitulation in May 1945, when a cargo ship containing goods destined for Germany was unloaded in the totally devastated port of Rotterdam, where only a few of the cranes were still in working order. A few days later the goods effectively reached their destination in the industrial Ruhr area. Thus Rotterdam resumed its function of transit port for the German hinterland immediately after the Second World War had come to an end. Despite the deep wounds that had been inflicted, despite the hundreds of thousands of Dutch civilians who had lost their lives, a first step had been taken towards renewed co-operation with the Netherlands' giant eastern neighbour. Rather than allowing itself to be guided by sentiments, the Dutch government made a rational decision based on the consideration that rehabilitation of the Dutch economy depended to a large extent on the reconstruction of Germany as an industrial nation. The Netherlands actively supported the inclusion of Germany in the so-called Marshall Plan — a substantial American aid programme aimed at enabling the speedy reconstruction of war-torn Europe — and rejected the earlier American Morgenthau Plan, which would have restricted assistance towards the reconstruction of Germany to the agricultural sector only.

Present day constituents are still appreciative of the fact that the then Dutch government based its decision on common sense, rather than on sentiments. The expansion of the transit trade during the post-war years resulted in this sector becoming one of the most significant pillars of the Dutch economy. At the same time, the earnings thus generated enabled gradual enhancement of port facilities and road infrastructure. New opportunities opened up with the exploration of relatively large deposits of natural gas. And yet again, it was Germany that — being one of the destination countries of gas exports — contributed further to the reconstruction of Dutch post-war society.

The transit-facilitating role of the Netherlands has come to take on a significance that by far exceeds the importance of the earlier transportation services. What started as simply providing transit facilities to upstream Germany has meanwhile been transformed and expanded in such a way that the Netherlands has become a major Gateway, servicing the entire north-western European region. Commodities that are being routed through the Netherlands now reach their destination deep into the European hinterland in a speedy manner and without problems. That is how we have specialised ourselves internationally, supported by investments in what is now a state-of-the-art infrastructure. The very presence of such infrastructure has also proven to be a key factor in the successful mobilisation of foreign investments — Japanese, Korean, American, British, and French companies have shown to have a preference for investing in the Netherlands, knowing that goods produced in the Netherlands can easily reach all markets throughout north-western Europe. In this way, transit facilitation has strengthened the Netherlands' own industrial activities (manufacturing, assembly, etc.) and has thus contributed to broadening of its economic base. Perhaps even more important than the eco-

nomie spin-offs are the changes in mind-set and perception that have emanated from our business-like and rational interaction with our eastern neighbours. In time the deep sense of alienation between the Dutch and German peoples was overcome, not least due to the numerous commercial contacts. People who — whether forced by necessity or otherwise — have to interact with one another frequently, cannot but get to know each other better. This, in turn, contributes to fostering mutual understanding and appreciation. A Dutch proverb has it that "unfamiliarity breeds unpopularity". Relations that initially started in a hesitant and reserved manner have in the course of time blossomed into an excellent co-operation, into innumerable friendships and into recognition of shared social and cultural traits on both sides of the border.

The co-operation with its mighty neighbour has yielded an internationally recognised position for the Netherlands: a small but wealthy nation that respects the principles of social justice and that meets international appreciation in its strive for justice, peace, security and human rights.

When presented with such retrospect, one cannot escape perceiving parallels with Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a country with a vast potential, rich fertile soil, a dedicated and industrious population, natural gas deposits, and waterways connecting it to a vast hinterland. Moreover, Bangladesh is a country that assumes an active and serious role in the international arena: as a member of the UN Security Council and as one of signatory countries to the CTBT.

All in all, it is evident that relationships between countries and peoples should not be looked at in a static manner, since history has proved that such relationships can be very dynamic indeed. In this respect, it is — first and foremost — the political leadership who are in a position to take enabling initiatives. Improvement of international relations will without exception come to the benefit all parties concerned.



Dick C B den Haas
Ambassador of The Netherlands to Bangladesh



Her Majesty Queen Beatrix

The Netherlands to organize the Biggest Gas Conference

The Netherlands is to host the biggest gas conference in the world in 2006. The decision was taken during a meeting of the International Gas Union (IGU) in Korea. The world gas conference, which is combined with a huge exhibition, is held once every three years. Three years ago it took place in Denmark, this year it is France's turn, and in 2003, Japan will serve as host. The conference attracts approximately 5,000 participants from countries all over the world that produce, transport, buy or sell gas. The accompanying exhibition covers approximately 40,000 square meters of floor space. In 2006 the event will take place in Amsterdam from 6 to 9 June. The KVGN (Royal Association of Gas Manufacturers in the Netherlands) will be responsible for the organization, it intends to work closely with Gasunie and EnergieNed. By hosting the World Gas Conference, the KVGN is also entitled to occupy the post of president of the International Gas Union from 2003 to 2006.

Shell Companies in Bangladesh salute Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands on the occasion of Her Birthday.



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Development Cooperation : Bangladesh-The Netherlands

THE development cooperation relationship between Bangladesh and the Netherlands started over 25 years ago after independence of Bangladesh. Ever since Bangladesh has been a very important partner in development for the Netherlands. This is applicable both to the two governments and to many NGOs, educational institutes/universities and other private institutions in our two countries.

Over the years the sectors that were considered a priority to both sides changed gradually. The views in Bangladesh, the Netherlands and globally on how best to address the enormous challenge of alleviating poverty and improving welfare in the most efficient and effective way have changed as well. However, the main objective of the many activities that were undertaken was alleviation of poverty, especially for those people in Bangladesh who suffer most.

Project Approach
Many years of development cooperation may have resulted in some degree of poverty alleviation, but one cannot but conclude that it has not been able to take away the causes of underdevelopment and poverty in an effective way. Although progress has been achieved for example with respect to health and family planning and economic development Bangladesh still ranks high on the list of poorest countries.

Projects are often a result of defining a problem (geographically and/or sectoral) in isolation of its setting. A solution to the problem is being sought in partly exclusive

conditions, which are often defined by a donor agency. Sometimes one has at least identified external parameters which may be of influence and which require specific additional interventions. The exclusive and isolated character of these project-type of solutions makes it very hard for the recipient government to take care of sustainability in the long run. It is for example very difficult for the recipient party to ensure adequate maintenance after the project is finalised, as organisational and technical arrangements and procedures often differ between projects. In addition one has to acknowledge that in trying to achieve specific project goals actors involved often overlook the wider context. Duplication, inefficiency in general, and even contra-productivity is a result.

The prominent role of donors in identifying projects and the tendency to ensure that the portfolio remains "filled" according to wishes of the donor, leads to a situation in which (local) government agencies are hardly more than the providers of projects and service providers to the same projects. In order to alleviate poverty and to help vulnerable groups in society at micro-level, government institutions are largely being by-passed.

The Need for a Different Approach

As research findings published by many different institutions indicated that the above described so-called "project approach" has had a limited impact on poverty reduction the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation of

Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/DAC), of which many donor countries are member, recommended a few years ago to leave behind the so-called "project approach" and instead look into the possibilities of supporting sectoral programmes.

In line with the OECD/DAC findings and recommendations the Minister for Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, Mrs. Eveline Herfkens, started a reconsideration of the Dutch development cooperation policies from the end of 1998 onwards. Some of the lessons learned from past experience indicate that the following conditions are particularly important:

- A "good governance" environment in the recipient country and "ownership" matter a lot. Activities do not fit well into the policies and programmes of recipient countries if those activities are not appreciated and supported by the recipients and if there is no "good governance" environment;
- "Coherence": activities spread thinly over many sectors lose momentum, leverage and can not be well coordinated with activities carried out by other actors;
- "Donor-coordination" should improve as a matter of urgency, as too often activities supported by different development partners are overlapping and sometimes even obstructing each other.

These lessons learned were supported by a report prepared by David Dollar for the World Bank, in which he stressed that the main causes for underdevelopment can be found within administrations, where an en-