

Queen's Day

NATIONAL DAY OF THE NETHERLANDS

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

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Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands

MESSAGE



It is a great pleasure and honour for me to address the people of Bangladesh on the occasion of our National Day, the day that Her Majesty Queen Beatrix celebrates her birthday. On this day lots of festive events are organized throughout the Netherlands centered around Her Majesty Queen Beatrix. Queen's day coincides with the beginning of Spring and makes for a joyous occasion on which people come together to wish her Majesty and her family well. I am very happy to celebrate this festive day in Bangladesh with our Bangladeshi friends.

As the Netherlands' Ambassador to Bangladesh, I am pleased to use the opportunity that the celebration of Queen's day provides, to assess the relations between the two countries that although far apart geographically - have a lot in common. The Dutch and Bangladeshi peoples have had 35 years of intensive interactions. The Netherlands was among the first countries to recognize Bangladesh after independence and we became development partners soon after. Bangladesh figures prominently on the list of the 36 countries that have structural bilateral development relations with the Netherlands. Today our joint development program focuses on three sectors: primary education, water management (including water supply and sanitation) and health (including nutrition and population issues). Special attention is given to good governance, to the role and position of women and to private sector development. At present disbursement level for the bilateral development co-operation programme stands at 60 mln Euros and our support

increasingly takes the form of joint financing with other donors in order to lower overheads.

The Netherlands is interested in Bangladesh not solely as a development partner but also as a business partner with a huge economic potential, and as a partner in the international arena. Like Bangladesh, the Netherlands is eager to play its role in regional cooperation and the United Nations. At the international level our policies and interventions are directed towards a global system that is just and at peace, that favours the free movements of goods and services and respects human rights and law. The Netherlands therefore highly appreciates Bangladesh's contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, enhancing regional relations, and fighting terrorism.

In the past year, Bangladesh has gone through one of the most difficult periods in its history. The present interim government has shown a high degree of commitment to restoring law and order and getting rid of the corrupt practices that have, for too long a period, characterised day to day life. We commend them for that. We are also confident that the interim government will work towards providing a strong basis for free and fair elections at the earliest possible moment.

In the Netherlands we had parliamentary elections last November. As is often the case, the elections resulted in a situation where different political parties had to sit together to negotiate the terms for a coalition government. In February the negotiations were successfully concluded and a new government was sworn in. The motto of the new Dutch coalition government is "Working together, Living together". It reflects the government's vision of a society whose members respect each other and live together in solidarity, a society that uses its power for progress, that promotes individual creativity and initiative. This motto has also been translated into the government's foreign policy. The Netherlands wants to play an active role in the world, helping to provide opportunities for countries and people to overcome poverty and to create a situation where they can live together in peace and prosperity.

We at the Royal Netherlands Embassy are honoured to play our part to further strengthen the relations between our countries.

Kees Beemsterboer
Ambassador of the Netherlands to
Bangladesh

The Netherlands: A reliable partner in development

Like its predecessors, the new Dutch government attaches great importance to supporting the developing countries in their efforts to alleviate poverty and promote development. The Netherlands is among the most generous donors on the globe and it is one out of only five countries to meet the international target set at 0.7% Gross National Income (GNI) for Official Development Assistance (ODA). More importantly, successive governments agreed to raise the target to 0.8% of GNI. For 2007, this will translate to approximately 4.6 billion Euros that the Netherlands will spend worldwide on development activities.

The development cooperation between the Netherlands and Bangladesh dates back to 1973. The Netherlands programme in Bangladesh is fully aligned with the National Strategy to Accelerate Poverty Reduction. In supporting this strategy, the Netherlands contributes towards improving access to basic education, to improving health and drinking water and sanitation, better management of available natural water resources as well as to private sector development, good governance and gender equality. For the year 2007, total expenditure is expected to reach more than 64 million Euros.

Education

Bangladesh has made good progress in education. It has already achieved gender parity and high enrolment rates. But important challenges remain for meeting the Education for All goals and the Millennium Development Goals. High drop-out rates and low learner achievement are important bottlenecks. With an increase of our annual education budget from Euro 18 million in 2006 to Euro 28 million from 2007 onwards, the Netherlands stand ready to assist Bangladesh with these bottlenecks and bring high quality education into the classroom, because that's where it matters the most!

In the Education sector, the Netherlands has been Bangladesh's steady partner for many years. Together with other development partners, we support both formal and non-formal basic education programmes and encourage participation of civil society in policy development, implementation and monitoring. We are strong advocates of the involvement of local communities and parents in school activities.

Health

The health sector in Bangladesh has demonstrated significant successes over the past three decades. For example, total fertility rates and infant and child mortality rates have been greatly reduced. Challenges still remain - such as the persistent high rates of maternal mortality and malnutrition, violence against women (which counts for at least 14% of maternal deaths) and limited access to services for women and girls. The strategic goal for the Netherlands support to Bangladesh is to further improve the health of the Bangladeshi, with particular emphasis on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of Bangladeshi women and girls.

In addition to supporting the multi-donor Health Nutrition and Population Sector Programme, we contribute to reaching the health related MDGs through providing core support to ICDDR,B and funding activities of NGOs, such as BRAC. The health budget for 2007 amounts to Euro 12 million.

Water

The Netherlands and Bangladesh have been working together in the water sector since 1975. Water is crucial for Bangladesh. It determines agriculture, health, safety, economic activities, and culture. To Bangladesh water is both a friend and a foe. The mighty rivers feed agricultural lands during the rainy season, but too much water causes floods and destruction. And too little rain means no crops, and then hunger. Sharing similar problems helps our joint efforts. We can learn from each other's solutions.

Today, the Bangla-Dutch development cooperation programme has three pillars:

1. capacity building of the Bangladeshi authorities for their new tasks in participatory water management;
2. improvement of the lives of people in coastal zones;
3. management of rivers that run across borders.

The Netherlands leads the donor group that deals with water management and tries to bring all partners in the water sector together. We work intensively with the Ministry of Water Resources and the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives. We also work with BRAC and associated NGOs, and with the Asian Development Bank, the Worldbank, the UN and with other donors. Together with our partners we have a stake in investments in Bangladesh's water sector valued at around 400 million US dollars. And every year we spend some 20 million US dollars on water programmes in Bangladesh.

Governance

At the sectoral (education, health and water) level, enhancing participation, accountability and transparency is a key objective. Communities have a better voice in water management through Water Management Organisations, parents are active in School Management Committees and women support groups are set up to act as watchdogs to ensure maternal and neonatal care.

At the central level, Bangladesh, which is facing a critical time in its history, has to deal with many challenges which include upholding the rule of law, protecting human rights and human security and promoting a democratic system of governance within which elected representatives of the people work in transparent and accountable ways. To deal with these challenges requires a concerted effort and a commitment by all.

Meeting basic needs and improving livelihoods of vulnerable and poor people require interventions that have sustainable outcomes. The Netherlands is working together with the Government, civil society and the private sector to ensure that Bangladesh is able to meet these challenges.

Private sector

Private sector development (PSD) is a crucial element in achieving sustainable poverty reduction. A strong and vibrant private sector is the engine for economic growth. Economic growth alone, however, is not enough. What is needed is pro-poor growth. Pro-poor growth is a high growth rate in combination with a pattern of growth that enables the poor to increase their income and to take advantage of

these opportunities. The conditions for PSD and pro-poor growth are influenced by five factors: economic governance and reform, access to markets, access to finance, quality of infrastructure, and human capacities. Together, these five factors make up for the business enabling environment in a country. While we already support a number of activities which contribute towards improving this enabling environment, a more comprehensive programme is envisaged in the years to come.

Gender equality

In all our activities the role and position of women and girls receive special attention aiming to ensure their basic human rights as citizens

of this country. This means among others that we try to make sure that women are sufficiently participating in Water Management Groups and School Management Committees, that the latter have an eye for the specific problems girls face when going to school and that health systems are not neglecting the specific needs of women and girls.

In conclusion.....

It goes without saying that Bangladesh is responsible for its own development. The role of donors, like the Netherlands, is to provide assistance by supporting pro-poor policies and initiatives taken by both public and private actors. The Netherlands stands ready to continue playing this role!



Women in Barisal Division digging out silted waterway

On the Occasion
of Queen's Day & National Day
of the Netherlands

Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited
wishes to extend
profound gratitude and
heart-felt felicitations
to Her Majesty
Queen Beatrix
and
to the friendly
people of
The Netherlands



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