

Danish Constitution Day

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MESSAGE



It is a privilege and honour for me to address the people of Bangladesh on the occasion of the Constitution Day of Denmark. On the 5th of June 1849 King Frederik VII of Denmark approved a democratic constitution with a two-chamber parliament and political parties. All subsequent changes of our constitution have entered into force on the 5th of June.

As Denmark's Ambassador to Bangladesh since September 2006, I am pleased to use the celebration of our Constitution Day as an opportunity to assess the relations between our two countries. Denmark has supported Bangladesh in its development endeavours since its independence in 1971. The long history of development cooperation and now also business cooperation between Bangladesh and Denmark is an expression of the strong ties that exist between our two countries.

Progress in economic growth and reforms
The economic growth in Bangladesh has averaged 5% of GDP p.a. for several years and has now moved to over 6% p.a. Poverty reduction has in recent years reached nearly 2% p.a. These are results that Bangladesh can be proud of and Bangladesh is gaining strength and is increasingly becoming an interesting

partner from a business perspective. Denmark is also happy to note that the Government of Bangladesh is pursuing the governance reform. The Anti Corruption Commission has been reformed. The process of separating the judiciary from the executive has been accelerated. The Election Commission has been reconstituted and has initiated the process of introducing electoral reforms as well as preparations for the next election. It has been decided to establish a National Human Rights Commission. Denmark stands ready to help Bangladesh in the implementation of these and further reforms, including civil service reform.

Next election

The last year has not been an easy one for Bangladesh. In my first nine months here I have experienced three different governments. Denmark welcomes the fact that the interim government and Election Commission have committed to a timeframe for elections. It is vital that the reforms, which are necessary to ensuring free and fair elections, are put in place speedily and effectively. The international community, including the EU and Denmark, has expressed a readiness to contribute to facilitating that process in order to return to parliamentary democracy as soon as possible.

Development

The Danish strategy for development cooperation with Bangladesh (2005-2009) involves an amount of 1200 crore taka. The main areas of support are agriculture (crops, aquaculture, livestock, and rural roads), sanitation and drinking water supply, human rights, democratisation and good governance.

Ever since its inception, the Danish development assistance to the agricultural sector has made a significant contribution to increasing agricultural and fisheries production and income, improving food security, thus reducing the vulnerability of millions of poor households. Support to the water and sanitation sector has ensured access to safe water and improved sanitation for millions of people in the rural areas and a number of municipalities. Tens of thousands of marginalized women have obtained jobs and small personal savings through the Danish

assistance to the infrastructure sector. Promotion of human rights, democratisation and good governance is a central element of Danish development assistance to Bangladesh. The human rights and good governance activities have contributed to the improvements in the judicial system, a freer press, addressing violence against women and promoting their rights and strengthening of civil society institutions.

While designing the second phases of the sector programmes (Agriculture and Rural Roads, Water and Sanitation and Human Rights and Good Governance) special attention is given to the alignment of Danish development assistance with the national policies, systems and procedures. The Embassy of Denmark also continuously explores opportunities for strengthening donor harmonisation in order to ensure maximum efficiency and impact of the combined development assistance.

Business-to-Business Programme

Since the end of 1999 Danida has supported a very successful private sector instrument in Bangladesh - the B2B (business-to-business) Programme - targeting private sector development. The B2B facilitates long-term commercially viable business collaborations between companies in Bangladesh and in Denmark. By using business linkages as an instrument for economic and social development, the B2B programme seeks to improve living conditions for the people in Bangladesh. Ever since the inception of the programme in Bangladesh, B2B has supported more than 50 long-term projects in different sectors. The local business partners were aided by ideas and innovations brought in by their Danish counterparts. In most instances these partnerships have become pioneers in their own area of business. Over the 7 years period since the start, the B2B has committed more than 250 crore taka in the form of grants for these private sector business co-operations.

I am hopeful that the warm relations between Denmark and Bangladesh will continue and become even stronger in the coming years.

Einar Heibogaard Jensen
Ambassador of Denmark to Bangladesh

The political system

LARS BILLE

THE Danish political system is a stable, highly organised and well-functioning parliamentary democracy.

Opinion polls show that 70% of the electorate are more or less interested in politics and almost 90% largely satisfied with the way in which the democracy works.

The system is characterised by a culture of compromise and consensus between the political players and there are good opportunities for broad popular participation in the political processes at a national and local level through membership of the political parties, interest groups, user committees and various organisations and associations.

In 2006, around 200,000 Danes belonged to a political party, corresponding to 5% of the voters. 75% of the work force belonged to a trade union.

Organisations and Associations

It is difficult fully to understand the political system without looking at political life outside the official institutions. In the last quarter of the 19th century, commerce and working life in general became increasingly organised. This took place concurrently with the organisation of political life. To this should be added the establishment of folk high schools and later a number of voluntary general education associations, linked to the political parties.

Organisation gathered momentum during World War I (1914-1918) and since then, virtually all interests in Danish society have become organised, be it within work, business, culture or leisure. By the start of the new millennium, every Dane aged between 18 and 70 on average belonged to three organisations. The democratic culture is deeply rooted in all these voluntary associations and organisations and many of them receive



Christiansborg Castle in central Copenhagen is the home of the Danish parliament

PHOTO: SOREN KUHN

public grants.

The Folketing

The Danish parliament, the Folketing, has 179 members, of whom 175 are elected in Denmark, two on the Faroe Islands and two in Greenland. The seats are allocated to the parties on the basis of proportional representation, so that the constitution of the Folketing very closely reflects the party-political preferences of the total electorate. The voting age is 18. Women have had the vote since 1915.

The main channel of political participation is the general election. Elections take place every four years, but the prime minister may call an election if he (so far it has always been a man) considers it politically necessary or advantageous, and he must call an election if the government receives a vote of no confidence in the Folketing. As

no single party has had a majority in the Folketing since 1909, most Danish governments have been minority governments consisting of one or more parties. Prime ministers have therefore often made use of the right to dissolve the Folketing, when the compromises required to obtain a majority have become too unacceptable for the government.

General Elections

In order to stand for a general election, a party must either have elected representatives in the Folketing when the election is called or have collected a number of voters' signatures corresponding to 1/175 of the valid votes cast at the last election. For a party to be returned, it must receive 2% of the valid votes cast. The electoral threshold is thus very low compared to most other countries. At the last general election in 2005, 10

parties stood with a total of 947 candidates, including 299 women. 84.5% of the 4 million voters voted and 7 parties were returned.

The History of the Political Parties

The Danish party system is a multi-party system, whose basic characteristics were formed in the period between the adoption of the first constitution in 1849 and the full implementation of proportional representation in 1920. As there were no significant ethnic, religious, regional or linguistic differences in the Danish society, the parties were formed on the basis of the economic, social and ideological divisions of the time. The traditional party system rested on four pillars: The Social Democratic Party (Socialdemokratiet), founded 1871 in 2002 they changed their name to The Social Democrats, with the trade union movement,

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