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A YEAR OF CHANGE

parallel to mainstream education system.

Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry:

- A total of 475 megawatt of electricity has been added to the national power grid till now since the assumption of office by the present government.



Communication Ministry: • The design for the 6.15 kilometre long Padma Bridge has been finalised, which is expected to be opened for traffic movement within 2013.

Primary and Mass Education Ministry:

- Course completion examination for primary school students has been conducted for the first time in Bangladesh with the participation of 18,23,465 students.
- The process of appointing 25,000 new teachers for primary schools has been started.

Health and Family Welfare Ministry:

- Over 10 thousand community clinics which were built during the tenure of the previous Awami League government have been relaunched. A project has been undertaken for setting up 18 thousand community clinics throughout the country between 2009 and 2014.

Home Affairs Ministry:

- The law and order situation has greatly improved compared to the previous years.
- Various measures have been taken for improving law and order, which included arrests of identified criminals and terrorists, recovery of illegal arms, arrests of muggers and hijackers, curbing extortions and hijackings, crackdown against mobile and cyber crimes and special drives all over the country including Dhaka city by the law enforcement agencies.

Defence Ministry:

- The ration allowance for the pension recipients of Bangladesh Army has increased its adult allowance to 207 Taka in place of 147 Taka and minor allowance to 162 Taka from 137 Taka.
- UN Mission has increased the participation of Bangladesh Army in UN Peace-keeping Mission. Till date in comparison to the previous year 360 more Army Officers and JCO along with soldiers have joined the mission.
- Bangladesh Air Force has modernized its analog radar into a digitalized one. In Cox's Bazaar, installation of another Air Defense radar is under process.

Commerce Ministry:

- Compared to previous years, the prices of essentials have remained stable and within the purchasing power of the common people.
- An incentive package has been announced for overcoming the effects of global recession and for ensuring the sustenance of trade and commerce. It includes cash incentives as well as policy support.

Industries Ministry:

- A 5-year long self-employment generation and poverty alleviation project worth Taka 31 crore 20 lakh has been undertaken for providing employment to at least one member of each family in the country.

Foreign Affairs Ministry:

- The position of Bangladesh has been strengthened with regard to food security, combating climate change and protection of labour market in the backdrop of global recession due to participation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in various international forums.

Science and Information and Communication Technology Ministry:

- The Information and Communication Technology Policy 2009 has been framed for flourishing and developing information technology in the country.
- Various projects are being implemented for establishing a digital Bangladesh, especially through imparting training to the poorer segments of population.

Posts and Telecommunications Ministry:

- The country's internet density grew by 1 percent to 4 percent and the tele-density rose to 38 percent from the previous 30 percent during the past one year.
- The wireless internet technology Wimax has been launched in Bangladesh.

Housing and Public Works Ministry:

- The Rajuk (Capital Development Authority) has allotted 7 thousand plots from among a highest ever 157 thousand applicants through transparent lottery.
- A plan has been chalked out for establishing 4 satellite towns around Dhaka city under Public Private Partnership (PPP) with provisions for solar and wind-generated electricity in order to reduce traffic-jams in the metropolis.

Environment and Forests Ministry:

- Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina joined a meeting of 25 heads of states and governments of selected countries organised by the UN Secretary General in New York during 64th session of the UN General Assembly.
- Sheikh Hasina put forward a demand in Copenhagen for sanctioning 1.5 percent of the national income of developed countries as compensation to overcome the adverse impact of global climate change and called for other supports including transfer of environment-friendly technology.

Land Ministry:

- A total of 4,850 acres of agricultural khas lands have been distributed among over 13 thousand landless families in 436 upazilas throughout the country. These were handed over free of charge on a permanent basis along with necessary documents.

Water Resources Ministry:

- The government has undertaken various measures for maintaining the flow of rivers, which include capital dredging and river training, after identifying blocked channels as well as shoals at source-points and currents of tributaries.

Civil Aviation and Tourism Ministry:

- Biman Bangladesh Airlines has earned profit during 2009 for the first time in its history and is now poised to enter the country's stock market. A tourism act and policy is being formulated by prioritising the tourism sector.

Jute and Textiles Ministry:

- Initiative has been taken to restart the closed jute mills. Due importance is being attached to jute and jute goods as an environment-friendly agricultural commodity and steps have been taken to explore new buyers in the global market in order to enhance its exports.

Information Ministry:

- An Information Commission has been constituted for implementing the Right to Information Act 2009 and

different follow-up measures have been taken in this regard.

Social Welfare Ministry:

- Steps have been taken to double the number of beneficiaries receiving allowances for the aged and distressed women under the project for expanding the social safety net coverage of the hardcore poor in order to reduce the number of poor from the current 6 crore 50 lakh to 4 crore 50 lakh by 2013 and 2 crore 20 lakh by the year 2021.

Cultural Affairs Ministry:

- Projects such as construction of National Art Gallery (2nd phase), Hasan Raja Academy and Action Plan for the Safeguard of Baul Songs are being implemented.
- Allocations have also been made for different projects initiated on the occasion of 400th anniversary of capital Dhaka.

Labour and Manpower Ministry:

- Vocational training has been imparted to 2 thousand unemployed youths through 39 technical training centres with the goal of providing employment opportunity to at least one member of each family.

Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Ministry:

- A total of 4 lakh 41 thousand 112 workers left the country with jobs between January and November 2009.
- Initiatives have been taken for exploring new labour markets and new labour wings have been opened in the Bangladesh Missions of Italy, Japan, Jordan, Sudan and Iraq.

Fisheries and Livestock Ministry:

- Centres for providing assistance to technology-based fish farming have been set up in 240 upazilas under 51 districts of the country.
- Compensations worth Taka 13 crore have been paid to poultry-farm owners adversely affected by avian influenza.

Youth and Sports Ministry:

- Initiative has been taken for imparting computer training at the doorsteps of rural youth trainees through mobile ICT centres in order groom the rural population as suitable manpower for building a digital Bangladesh.
- Necessary preparations have been made for properly holding the 2011 World Cup Cricket matches in Bangladesh including the inauguration ceremony.

Liberation War Affairs Ministry:

- Until now, names of 1 lakh 98 thousand 889 freedom fighters have been gazetted and honorary certificates have been handed over to 1 lakh 36 thousand 607 freedom fighters by the ministry.
- The retirement age of serving freedom fighters employed by the republic has been raised by 2 years. Around 14 thousand freedom fighter officers and employees will be benefited by this decision.

Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Ministry:

- Various committees have been reconstituted for swift implementation of unimplemented provisions of the treaty signed by the National Committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts with the Parbatya Chattagram Janasanghati Samity.

Religious Affairs Ministry:

- Due to proper Haj management by the government, a record number of Haj pilgrims could perform Haj at Makkah during 2009.
- With the objective of human resource development, a



massive plan has been adopted for involving around 5 lakh religious leaders (Alems-Olamas) in various socio-economic development activities, educational pursuits, environmental conservation and forestry programmes through 1 lakh 50 thousand educational institutions and 2 lakh 50 thousand mosques.

Women and Children Affairs Ministry:

- Opportunities for self-employment have been created by grooming able and efficient manpower and utilising technical and vocational trainings of urban poor, unemployed and destitute women.
- Steps have been taken for incorporating gender-related information in the next national census.

Shipping Ministry:

- The government has taken initiative for improving the navigability of stagnant rivers and creating safe navigation channels in rivers with the objective of overall development of the country. With this goal, a capital dredging programme worth Taka 11,470 crore has been undertaken for dredging 3,276 metres in 53 river-routes of the country. ■

Translation: Helal Uddin Ahmed

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First Year of Success: The Economy

installing solar panels, bio-gas and waste-treatment plants under the newly introduced 'green banking' programme with the objective of encouraging use of solar and alternative energy for meeting deficits in power and gas supply.

The banks have been directed to gear up their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities under the humane banking programme. The banks have been already advised to place an official as focal point in each bank-branch for providing banking services to the handicapped.

According to the findings of a recent study titled, Long-term Outlook for the BRIC and N-11 Post-crisis conducted by the US investment bank, Goldman Sachs, Bangladesh is a notable nation among those who have proved their adeptness in facing the global recession; furthermore, Bangladesh is one of the 11 promising countries of the 21st century. Among these 11 nations, Bangladesh is the only country where all micro-economic indicators have shown sufficient improvement. The economy of the country also stands on a strong footing based on macro-economic indicators. It would not take long for Bangladesh to prove the accuracy of Goldman Sachs study if proper coordination is established between the financial and revenue sectors for achieving success in the domestic emerging sectors through agriculture, SME, external economic sectors and financial intermediation.

Overall, the dynamism of Bangladesh economy during 2009 has created the foundation for achieving higher economic growth, stability and poverty alleviation. The challenge for 2010 would be wider inclusion of the country's mass-people in economic activities and expediting growth and poverty alleviation by incorporating environment-friendly attributes. I believe that we shall definitely be able to confront these challenges through united endeavour. ■

Translation: Helal Uddin Ahmed

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Foreign Relations: One Year in Retrospect

If we take stock of the past one year, we see that the confidence reposed on Bangladesh by the international community could be gauged from the results of elections to UN and international bodies. Bangladesh was re-elected to the UN Human Rights Commission for the period 2009-12, UN Commission on the Status of Women for 2010-12, Executive Committee of UNESCO for 2009-13, ECOSOC for 2010-12, ASOSAI for 2009-12 and member of International Maritime Organization for 2010-11 period.

After assuming office, Sheikh Hasina went to Saudi Arabia on her first trip abroad. She met the Saudi King and discussed with him matters which concerned Bangladesh's interests. Alongside improvement of relations with Saudi Arabia due to the visit, the Saudi King pledged to resolve the complexities centring on transfer of 'Iqama' of Bangladeshis working there. A decision was also taken to annul the existing quota system for Bangladeshi workers in Saudi Arabia. Apart from Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Hasina also visited Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in the Middle-east. Pledges of assistance were obtained from Qatar for dredging of rivers, setting up of community clinics, extraction and distribution of gas and oil, construction of flood and cyclone shelters in the coastal region and technical training for raising the skill of workers going abroad.

Even the President was involved in the diplomatic efforts of Bangladesh last year. He attended the inauguration ceremony of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology at the invitation of the Saudi King. He also visited Turkey and discussed issues of mutual interests with the Turkish President.

After Saudi Arabia, the next significant bilateral trip that Sheikh Hasina undertook was to our South Asian neighbour Bhutan. Bangladesh was able to convey some highly effective signals through this visit. Bhutan and India were the first two countries to recognise Bangladesh during our liberation war. The Bangladesh Prime Minister decided to undertake this trip by recalling that historic debt. Through this, we could demonstrate our commitment to history on the one hand and accorded recognition to that spontaneous friendship during difficult times on the other. Shared values were also relevant here. Bhutan has embraced a democratic order spontaneously. At a time when democracy has been restored in our country under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, her visit to Bhutan as the head of an elected government is also indicative of our value-centric foreign policy. Subjects discussed during the visit included regional connectivity, expansion of trade and joint harnessing of power. The talks were held in the backdrop of concerns raised regarding the impact of global warming on Bhutan's glaciers, just as the global talks on climate change were heading towards a climax.

Based on the outcome of this visit, avenue has been opened up for establishing regional connectivity by involving India, Nepal and Myanmar. This connectivity can pass through Myanmar and other Southeast Asian nations and extend up to China in the north. Besides, the possibility of coordinated

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Digital Bangladesh: Bangabandhu's Golden Bangla in the Twenty-first Century

Bangladesh Summit' on 17-19 November 2009, which discussed the establishment of a Digital Bangladesh as well as its priority areas.

Definition of Digital Bangladesh: Digital Bangladesh can be defined as a happy, prosperous, educated population free from discrimination, corruption, poverty and hunger, which is truly a people's state and whose driving force is the digital technology. It encompasses the hopes, dreams and aspirations of the people of Bangladesh. It is the best means of meeting the minimum basic needs of the people. It is a vision for realizing the dreams of independence in 1971. It is a commitment for transforming Bangladesh from a least developed or poor country to a prosperous and rich nation by enhancing per capita and national income. It is the first step towards building a knowledge-based society. It is the Golden Bangla of the Twenty-first Century as dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

National Priority of Establishing a Digital Bangladesh: The first national pledge in establishing a digital Bangladesh includes elimination of poverty and discrimination from the country by utilising digital tools and establishing a people's state by meeting minimum basic needs of the people including their fundamental rights.

Creation of infrastructure should be a priority for establishing digital Bangladesh. All households in the country should have uninterrupted power supply. At the same time, they should be interconnected through digital networks comprising of cables or wireless technology. Apart from equipping people belonging to all regions of the country with digital tools, removal of digital divide should also be considered as a national priority.

Alongside setting up connections among the people as well as between the government and the people, priority should be attached to digital transformation of the government including the education system, grooming suitable manpower fit for a digital Bangladesh and development of the agriculture, industries and business sectors.



Objectives of a Digital Bangladesh: The objective of a digital Bangladesh is to improve the underdeveloped lifestyle of the people phase by phase and to gradually transform Bangladesh society into a knowledge-based one. In effect, it aims to convert to a digital mode all undertakings at all levels of society including people's lifestyle, education, health management, work procedure, industries, trade, production, economy, culture and people's government.

Establishment of a digital Bangladesh also has some political objectives. These have been narrated briefly in the following paragraphs.

a) **People's State:** The principal objective of a digital Bangladesh would be establishment of a people's state. This state would genuinely belong to the people. The basis of this vision is the liberation war of 1971 and the declaration of independence. Alongside establishing a knowledge-based society by using digital tools, this state would uphold all constitutional rights of the people including their fundamental human rights, alongside materialising their dreams for a better life. The digital technology would be applied without

water management of regional rivers and water-bodies has also been explored.

The then Foreign Minister of India had visited Bangladesh immediately after the formation of government by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. He informed Bangladesh that the Indian government was attaching top priority to existing friendly relations between the two countries. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will visit India soon to reinforce this friendly relationship. The door will open up for resolving longstanding unresolved issues through this visit. Our two countries are therefore standing on the door of new possibilities of cooperation with much enthusiasm and hope at the start of a new year.

We have also observed signs of qualitative improvement in our relations with Myanmar.

The Foreign Ministry has taken concerted initiatives on the issue of maritime borders and relevant matters. Bangladesh has started the process of international arbitration on the subject while continuing dialogue with India and Myanmar for swift resolution of the issue. There is consensus among all quarters that resolution of this issue will be expedited as a consequence.

It is quite noticeable that despite her busy schedules, the Prime Minister's participation and global presence in diplomatic initiatives of the Foreign Ministry brought about many successes. We observed intense diplomatic activities especially in the second half of the year. The endeavours of the Prime Minister have been accorded recognition on the global plane, especially in the area of climate change.



Let us now dwell on the theme of visibility. Compared to any other time in the past, the activities of the foreign ministry have now become more acceptable and transparent to the common people. The unique style of the foreign minister has encouraged openness in the ministry's operations. Everybody will concede that the clarity of her speech has facilitated establishment of an easy and credible bridge with the mass media. It can undoubtedly be claimed that the ministry's regular interactions with the media are bringing the people closer to it. Initiatives are now being taken this year to equip the ministry both structurally and strategically in the light of newer dimensions and horizons which are being constantly added to the global domain of diplomacy in the 21st century. ■

Translation: Helal Uddin Ahmed

discrimination at all levels of the state and this technology would be made easily available to the people.

b) **Basic Needs to be met by the State:** The state should take the responsibility of meeting minimum basic needs of the people including food, clothing, shelter, education and healthcare. The people would have to be taught digital technology so that they are able to earn a living for leading a respectable life. The state would have to ensure easy availability of technology to the people. The poorer segments of population would have to be groomed as knowledge-labourers or digital technology workers. This technology would have to be applied on a large scale in the rural areas in various sectors including knowledge-based economy, industries, commerce, agriculture, education, telecommunication, etc. The power of knowledge will have to prevail over the power of muscle in society. Removal of all kinds of digital divides including elimination of discriminations in all areas of life, eradication of poverty, improving the quality of people's lives, imparting digital age education to all citizens, ensuring equal facilities for all of them and establishing a high-income digital lifestyle will have to be ensured.

c) **Digital Trend of Politics:** The objective of digital Bangladesh is to run all activities of the government, the parliament and political parties by adhering to digital methods and to establish a digital trend in politics. Through this process, the people would be able to participate with the parliamentarians, government functionaries and politicians in an interactive fashion.

Programme for a Digital Bangladesh: The government will have to digitalise its work and reach its services to the doorsteps of the people after establishing a digital government. It would consist of digitalisation of all activities of the government including education, land administration, judiciary, healthcare, security and defence system.

Qualitative transformation of educational materials and teaching methods is a priority area in the establishment of a digital Bangladesh. Its main goal is to build a merit-based creative economy by effecting digital transformation of agriculture-industry and trade systems as well as prevailing economic structure. Merit and knowledge would dominate over financial and physical prowess if a digital Bangladesh is established by the year 2021. Bangladesh would then be able to provide leadership in the digital age of mankind by graduating into a creative and merit-based industrially developed country from an agro-based society. Employment opportunities for people would be reduced in the agriculture sector but growth in the industries sector and subsequent employment growth in the service sector would surpass even that of the industries sector. A major part of the national income would then be derived from the intellectual sector.

Progress: The government has successfully built up a base or the first step for a digital Bangladesh in the very first year of its commencement. An ICT Policy has been approved after overcoming past stagnations of the previous two governments and steps have been taken for implementing it. Due to introduction of e-commerce, sanctioning of licences for new technologies and modifications in the working procedure of the government, there are now signs of changes in all areas of governance.

Caution about Digital Bangladesh: The digital divide is being created and expanded throughout the globe due to proliferation of digital technology. The existing digital divide may further widen if the programme for a digital Bangladesh is implemented in the country. The facilities of a digital Bangladesh may be more helpful to its beneficiaries, the exploiters, the rich and special categories or classes of people. The life of people who are deprived of opportunities for acquiring knowledge in a knowledge-based society may become even more difficult. That is why the elimination of digital divide will have to be a key objective in building a digital Bangladesh. ■

Translation: Helal Uddin Ahmed