



National Day of Switzerland

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SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

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Message of the Ambassador



ON the occasion of the National Day of Switzerland, I wish to extend, on behalf of the people and government of Switzerland, the warmest greetings to our friends in Bangladesh, and to my Swiss compatriots living in the country.

The National Day of Switzerland, which is being celebrated today, commemorates an event that, according to legends, took place in 1291 when the people of three Swiss regions Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden swore the oath of confederation, and agreed to act in unison to protect their freedom. However, the National Day was only introduced 600 years later, in 1891, after the modern, democratic and federal state of Switzerland had been formed with the Federal Constitution of 1848. Today, Switzerland is a country that boasts a remarkable economy and a vibrant society with a focus on humanity, direct democracy, cultural diversity, technological innovation, human resource

development and prosperity for all.

This year's Swiss National Day celebration in Bangladesh has a particular significance. In 2012, Switzerland and Bangladesh are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations and direct cooperation between the two countries. Throughout these years, mutual respect and cooperation on a wide range of issues have been the basis of this friendship. Since Bangladesh's independence, bilateral relations have expanded from humanitarian aid and development, to rapidly increasing business, political and cultural exchanges, following the impressive socio-economic achievements made by Bangladesh. Here, I would like to highlight some key features of this partnership.

Economic and Development Cooperation

Bangladesh is increasingly becoming an important partner of Switzerland in regards to business and trade. Trade volume between the two countries has been burgeoning over the past decade. In 2011, bilateral trade between Switzerland and Bangladesh reached USD 337 million, registering a 32% growth over 2010. At present, around 80 Swiss companies are present in the country or represented through local agents. For many years, big Swiss multinational companies have been investing substantially in core sectors, namely pharmaceuticals, chemicals, food, machinery, construction and services, in Bangladesh. The Swiss-Bangladesh joint business body the Switzerland Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industries (SBCCI) is

very active in the business landscape of this country and working hard to further boost bilateral trade. In recent years, we have seen that new small and medium sized Swiss companies are also becoming interested to open business in Bangladesh, particularly in the promising IT sector. I am confident that the trade volume between our two countries has a great potential for continuous growth if the business environment will become even more stable and reliable.

Bangladesh's socio-economic development, over the last decades, has been very impressive. The country has been able to make significant progress in improving social development indicators, notably with regard to food security, child mortality, nutrition intake and access to education. Switzerland is one of the long-standing development partners of Bangladesh. It is and will remain a priority partner country for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). SDC's annual contribution to Bangladesh currently stands at about USD 30 million. Our development cooperation focuses on the skills development and professional education of young people, on improving access to markets for the poorer segments of society, and on strengthening the capacity of local governments to deliver quality services to citizens. In addition to supporting projects with a national coverage, the Swiss development cooperation has been particularly active to foster broad-based development in two low-income and under-served rural areas,

i.e. Rajshahi and Sunamganj.

Skills development and access to markets are very important for Bangladesh's further socio-economic development. Switzerland is working in Bangladesh for improved living conditions of the poor and poorest by developing their potentials, skills and capacities as well as their access to opportunities. Switzerland has a long history and experience of having a functional and efficient local government system. As a result, our local governance interventions in Bangladesh are aimed at supporting and advancing participatory local governance for effective and performing bodies of elected representatives at local level. Additionally, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is a special theme of SDC's cooperation with Bangladesh. Very recently, Switzerland has completed the construction of 12 community based, multipurpose cyclone shelters and handed them over to the local population in remote areas of Bagerhat district for use, management and maintenance.

Climate change is increasingly becoming an important area of Swiss cooperation with particularly affected countries. Switzerland recognises Bangladesh's vulnerability vis-a-vis climate change and its possible negative impacts. In order to assist Bangladesh in carrying out climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, Switzerland is contributing to the Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund (BCCRF). Switzerland will provide up to USD 8 million by 2015 to the BCCRF, as part of its global

commitment to fight climate change.

40 Years of Friendship:

I take this opportunity to mention that Switzerland was quick to recognise Bangladesh. Already on 13 March 1972, the Swiss Confederation recognized the People's Republic of Bangladesh as a sovereign state. The 40 years anniversary, therefore, has provided us with an excellent opportunity to reflect on the strong and diversified relationship that exists between Bangladesh and Switzerland. To this end, the Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh is organising a series of events and programs in 2012 to highlight and underpin Swiss-Bangladesh friendship.

In order to reach a wider public, and especially the younger generation, we have produced a short video to mark this historic event and to portray our cooperation and friendship. The video was telecast on the television channels in Bangladesh throughout March 2012. Subsequently, thanks to social media networks, the video also went viral over the internet.

We have also organised a Swiss-Bangladesh Music Festival in Dhaka in November last year. Two Bangladeshi bands and the Swiss band STARCH performed at the festival. During the festival we also unveiled the commemorative logo shown on this page symbolising 40 years friendship which we have been using in all the events related with this anniversary celebration. We have also organised a Swiss Film Festival in March 2012 in Dhaka. During the rest of 2012, we will organize more events related to business, development



cooperation and culture in other cities on Bangladesh.

However, Swiss-Bangladesh friendship was also celebrated in Switzerland! The Fribourg International Film Festival (FIFF) 2012 invited Bangladesh to the festival and presented Bangladeshi movies under a special section called 'New Territory' in March 2012; a photo exhibition of a Bangladeshi photographer was also successfully shown in Switzerland.

Switzerland highly values its partnership and cooperation with Bangladesh. I am confident that this multifaceted cooperation with your wonderful country will be further deepened in the months and years ahead. In conclusion, I renew my thanks to the people and the Government of Bangladesh for their hospitality and their deep commitment to our joint undertakings. It is my honour to contribute to the continuation and further strengthening of the good cooperation between our two countries. I express sincere wishes for a prosperous future for all.

Dr. Urs Herren
Ambassador of Switzerland to Bangladesh



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