

Alliances françaises in Bangladesh

ALLIANCES françaises de Dhaka and Chittagong have welcomed more than 7000 students in 2012 and an audience of more than twenty thousand people for its different programs and facilities (café, resource centers, auditorium, galleries). What with its three sites in Dhaka (Dhanmondi, Uttara and the newly opened Gulshan branch) and its Chittagong centre, Alliance française is definitely one of the leading educational and cultural organisations in Bangladesh.

The Alliances françaises de Dhaka and Chittagong deliver quality teaching in line with the highest international standards. Their teachers are all qualified and trained to use the latest developments in language teaching methodology. Every year, the Alliances françaises in Bangladesh issue over 1,000 DELF certificates, official diplomas in French as a second language, valid internationally. In Alliance française, students enjoy all the facilities to quickly become proficient in French – small-size groups, make-up classes, personalised follow-up and a congenial atmosphere. Besides French classes, the Alliance française de Dhaka also offers a wide range of highly popular artistic workshops in the fields of music (piano, western classical guitar, violin), interior design, photography, videography and children painting.

Alliance française is a partner to all the major artistic festivals in Bangladesh: the International Film Festival of Dhaka, the Children Film Festival, and the Dhaka Art Summit. On the occasion of Chobi Mela VII, it hosted an exhibition of Mexican photographer Graziela Iturbide and co-organized a workshop by Malcolm Hutchison with the



British Council.

Alliance française prides itself on offering a different perspective on world cultures. In the past year, Alliances françaises in Bangladesh have helped broaden the horizon of the public by organizing two major cross cultural events. First, a contemporary dance workshop and show, *Dance in Resonance, Smoke in our Future*, organized jointly with Goethe Institut Bangladesh, where young Bangladeshi dancers appropriated western dance techniques to express their own local concerns under the guidance of dancers Samir Akika (France) and

Andy Zondag (Germany). The second event, *Cross perspectives on the Arab Spring*, was a series of conferences and debates that promoted a different vision of the Arab world through the insightful analyses of Abdelwahab Meddeb, a scholar of exceptional expertise on Arabic and Islamic tradition and of Stephanie Latte Abdallah, an expert on the lively feminism that is to be found in Arab and Muslim countries. World famous French-Lebanese singer-songwriter Abaji thrilled the audience with his multi instrumental shows and his encounter with Dhaka Band Joler

Gaan. Dhaka University and Asian University were partners of this exceptional program in collaboration with Institut Français. A collection of hitherto unpublished articles and short fiction was launched for this occasion by Michel Trinquier, French Ambassador to Bangladesh.

Alliance française has developed a unique expertise in inspiring, supporting and promoting sustainable development. Two series of programs titled *Sustainable Architecture in Bengal, Boat Technology and Culture of Chittagong and Bangladesh* proposed to the public of Bangladesh a reassessment of its technological and cultural legacy, one that inspired the whole world through the creation of bungalow or the adaptation of the Sampan, the Balam or the Dhingi. Rooted, adaptive, the culture of Bengal proves to be relevant to face the challenge of the contemporary world in a sustainable manner. This message was conveyed during exhibitions, seminars, concerts gathering the best experts in collaboration with BUET, CUET, CARITAS (Bangladesh), CRATerre, Taratari and Watever. It proved that Bangladesh remains a source of inspiration for the best engineers today. On that line Alliance française has also held its third slow food festival and remain the only one in Bangladesh to organize this event which spread worldwide. It brings together the immense variety of local and seasonal food and recipes of Bangladesh brought by the participants in their local attire. Sustainable development was again at the centre of a unique theatrical creation: *The Nicest Bin Ever* by Al and the Astroboli, an awareness raising show on recycling. Innovative, creative, and preparing future

generations to make their way into the global world while remaining proud of their own culture, is precisely what world icon Bibi Russell has been in her collaboration with Alliances françaises. The fashion designer has accepted to lead the first catwalk workshops she ever organized in Bangladesh in the Chittagong and Dhaka Alliances françaises. Along with Sakina M'Sa (France) and Michael Sontag (Germany), she has undertaken to train the next generations of designers in Bangladesh during a workshop jointly organized Goethe Institut to celebrate the 50th years anniversary of the Franco-German Friendship treaty. It concluded with the presentation of a collection during three unique fashion shows that linked the glory of Bengal's unique textile tradition and the most cutting edge of western fashion designing.

For these programs and many others Alliance française has been working in collaboration with such media, institutional and private partners as the French Embassy, Institut Français, Fondation Alliance française, the French-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Goethe Institut, the British Council, the Silpakala Academy, the Swiss Embassy, the A.K. Khan Foundation, The Daily Star, The DainikPurbokon, ATN Bangla, Maasranga, Zeppelin photo agency, Aamra, Taratari, Watever, and the Chittagong Club.

Last but not least, Alliance française is very grateful to its sponsors: The City Bank, The Commercial Bank of Ceylon, Montagut French Fashions Knitting Pvt. Ltd. and Getco. There is NEVER A DULL MOMENT WITH ALLIANCE FRANCAISE!

20 years of Bangladeshi-French Archaeological cooperation in Mahasthan

MAHASTHANGARH is a village close to the city of Bogra in northern Bangladesh, that is to say, in the part of the country included between the main branch of the Ganges (Padma) and the Brahmaputra.

Reported early in the 19th century, the site has been identified by General Cunningham, founder of the Archaeological Survey of India, as Pundranagara ancient city founded by the Mauryan Empire and active until the arrival of Islam in Bengal in the 13th and 14th centuries.

Located along the river Karatoya today a small stream, but once a major river, wider than the main Brahmaputra River – Mahasthan / Pundranagara is a citadel surrounded by ramparts of 1 to 1.5 km length. Inside, they found various remains, especially in the eastern part (near the river), surrounded outside by many other sites: Hindu temples, Buddhist monasteries, unidentified monuments. However, rapid population growth in the region leads to a gradual disappear-

ance of these secondary sites. Many objects have been found, either by chance or during excavations and are kept in the museum of the site, at the National Museum in Dhaka or in Varendra Research Museum in Rajshahi.

After the first exploration by Cunningham, sporadic excavations took place in Mahasthan in early 20th century. In between the two wars, this site has been undertaken by the Archaeological Survey of India, followed, after 1947, by the Department of Archaeology of Pakistan and by Bangladesh after the Independence.

In 1992, France and Bangladesh signed a cooperation agreement, and since 1993, a French mission has been established in Mahasthan. This is the only foreign archaeological mission in Bangladesh. Led from the outset, and so almost continuously, by Jean-François Salles, since 2013 it is under the responsibility of Vincent Lefèvre.

Unlike previous searches, French excavations are marked by continuity. Two phases of research have

been completed, which allows answering to the initial objective: the establishment of the chronological sequence of the site. The first phase (1993-2000) focused on the eastern area of the wall, before being complemented by a brief search on the northwest door. From the year 2000, a second phase has been focusing on the south of the site, in a place called Mazar, near a mosque housing a tomb, which was the object of pilgrimage. These three areas - completed last year by the Bangladeshi search of the "copper" door in the southwest - revealed consistent evidences: the wall has certainly undergone several phases of reconstruction, but its current layout dates back to the 4th century BC. City Pundranagara was then an outpost of the Mauryan Empire and was the largest city in the east of the Indian world. The sequence of occupation is continued until the 13th century, but calls to revise the traditional sequencing of Indian history (specially the Gupta period, particularly discreet here). In addition, excavations have



unearthed traces of earthquakes as well as seats.


The results of the first phase have already been published and a second volume is nearing completion (release is expected for the end of the year). The excavation of the second phase is completed but the stratigraphy and materials are being studied to prepare the publication

in two volumes.

The change of direction corresponds to the beginning of a third phase. While placing a continuation of previous years, the goal is different: time frames being installed, it is now to analyze, as much as possible, the urban organization of the site and its inclusion in the immediate environment. Similarly, the relation-


ship between the city itself and sites in close proximity will be subject to future research.

These 20 years of Bangladeshi-French cooperation allow us to understand the early history of Bengal. Apart from the excavations, the French archaeological mission and the Embassy of France in Bangladesh have steadily worked to train Bangladeshi archaeologists in France and Bangladesh and to promote Bangladeshi heritage. In March 2013, the French archaeological mission of Mahasthangarh, the Embassy of France in Bangladesh and the Department of Archaeology organized in Paharpur a training session on preservation of terracotta decorative plaques. This training aimed to teach to Bangladeshi assistants of the Department of Archaeology and museums the basic technologies for the preservation and conservation of terracotta decorated plaques of Paharpur, to begin a long-term operation of rescue of this treasure and to give them a basic knowledge in preventive conservation for their own museums.




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Leading-edge economic sectors: France's trump card


CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18 growing in the years to come. Progress in medical technology and the rapid growth of nanotechnologies may prove to be the main-springs of the "next industrial revolution".

It is also in this sector that the Medtech company made a name for itself in 2012. Its CEO, Bertin Nahum, was ranked the fourth most revolutionary entrepreneur by Canadian magazine Discovery Series. His company designs, develops and markets a new generation of robotic surgical assistance technology.

The high-tech sector is equally important. Last December the CAC 40, the benchmark stock exchange index on the Paris Bourse, hailed the entry of Gemalto on the index. This leader in digital security boasted a record turnover of 2.2 billion euros in 2012, operations in around a hundred countries and over 10,000 employees, 1,500 of them engineers working in research and development. It is an industry with strong recruitment potential, according to the Ministry of the Economy, which estimates that 450,000 jobs will be created in this sector between now and 2015.

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