

UK'S trade and development commitment to Bangladesh

ALISON BLAKE and JANE EDMONDSON

MANY of our friends in Bangladesh have welcomed an announcement made on June 25 by the Rt Hon Liam Fox MP and Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, the Secretaries of State for International Trade and International Development respectively. The UK intends to secure Bangladesh's existing trade arrangement of duty-free and quota-free access to the UK market after the UK's departure from the European Union. This underlines the British government's commitment to building its trade relationship with Bangladesh after the UK has left the EU.

The UK and Bangladesh already enjoy a strong relationship on trade and development, with the UK a major source of investment into Bangladesh and a significant contributor to Bangladesh's industrial development and its progress in reducing poverty. More than two hundred firms from the UK are registered in Bangladesh, sharing expertise and bringing specialist products and services in every sector from power through banking to education. The UK is also the third largest single destination for exports from Bangladesh. Ten percent of all Bangladesh's export products go to the UK, valued at around USD 3.2 billion annually. It is a trade relationship that sees these exports, and especially garments, make their way from Chittagong to every corner of the British Isles.

We want the UK and Bangladesh to become even closer trading partners after we have left the EU. It is an expression of the UK government's commitment that a post-Brexit Britain will be a Global Britain: a bold, outward-looking and self-confident nation committed to building a brighter, better future for its citizens and to forging stronger relationships with the rest of the world.

Because even amidst historic political change, the UK's belief in free trade as a force for good remains at the heart of our trade and

development work.

Nowhere is this more relevant than Bangladesh with its remarkable economic transformation and growth over the past decade.

Through our aid programme and our broader engagement, the UK is supporting Bangladesh's human development and its economic growth. And our work here is designed to ensure that Bangladesh delivers growth as sustainably and inclusively as possible, so that poverty continues to diminish and prosperity is shared as widely as possible among all of Bangladesh's people.

The garment sector in Bangladesh directly employs four million people, most of them women. It provides stable incomes, skills training and opportunities for the garment workers, their families and their communities. Bangladesh's competitive advantage in garments is partly because of the well-established relationships with buyers in the UK and across Europe.

The UK government's commitment to maintaining tariff and quota-free access after we have left the EU should give investors and manufacturers alike the confidence needed to make long-term investments in compliant, safe working places and in up-skilling workers and managers. Such investments



The UK is an important export destination for Bangladesh. Along with garments, jute goods are one of the major exportable items.

PHOTO: STAR

ensure that overseas buyers continue to see Bangladesh as their preferred source of garments. Bangladesh needs to continue its work to diversify its exports. The UK Aid and Trade work supports the government of Bangladesh in

identifying future growth sectors, and in making it easier for both local and international businesses, including British companies, to operate profitably in Bangladesh. DFID's first ever Economic Development Strategy recognises the importance of private sector investment in job-creating sectors—including manufacturing, infrastructure and commercial agriculture—so that countries industrialise faster and sustainably.

Our focus on economic development in Bangladesh is reinforced by our broader bilateral engagement including on human development. Trade flourishes where there are high levels of education, developed financial sectors, strong governance, accountable institutions and transparency that combats corruption.

The commitment the UK has made to Bangladesh and 47 other developing partners who currently benefit under the EU's Everything But Arms arrangement is to share the benefits of the prosperity that free trade brings, abroad and at home. Trade creates jobs, increases wages and attracts the investment needed to grow local industry. Trade is the biggest champion of domestic consumers, lowering costs of everyday products and raising household incomes. For producer countries, particularly in the developing world, it stimulates the economic growth which has already seen hundreds of millions lifted from the scourge of poverty. Britain will remain open for business to Bangladesh and the whole of the developing world.

Alison Blake is British High Commissioner to Bangladesh and Jane Edmondson is Head of Office, DFID Bangladesh.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

Containing the Trump threat in Europe



GUY VERHOFFSTADT

US President Donald Trump is clearly no leader of the free world. According to a new Pew Research Centre study, he is deeply unpopular in most countries, and has already done serious damage to the United States' reputation.

Pew finds that three quarters of the world has little or no confidence in Trump, whose favourability in most countries is now below that of George W. Bush when he left office. By that time, Bush had invaded Iraq and presided over the beginning of the 2008 global financial crisis. Even in neighbouring Canada, just 22 percent of those surveyed expressed confidence in Trump. Sentiment toward Trump is even more unfavourable in Western Europe. In Germany, only 6 percent of respondents think he is qualified to hold his current office, and 91 percent regard him as arrogant. Similarly, 89 percent of respondents in the United Kingdom think Trump is arrogant, and only 50 percent still believe that the US and the UK have a special relationship now that he is in office. This may help to explain why Trump's scheduled state visit to the UK has been postponed indefinitely.

The countries where Trump has the most widespread support are Poland (73 percent see the US favourably) and Hungary (63 percent), which are both led by populist right-wing governments. Poland's defence minister has already described Trump's planned visit to Warsaw this week as an "enormous event" and a "huge success" for the Law and Justice Party (PiS) government, which has continued to rage against the European Commission and alienate Poland's European allies.

Under the PiS, Poland has been drifting steadily toward authoritarianism and has become increasingly isolated within the European Union. So, it is not surprising that Trump would want to visit the country. After all, this is a president who campaigned on a platform of "America first"



US President Donald Trump with German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

PHOTO: AFP

nationalism, bet on the far-right French populist Marine Le Pen, and applauded the outcome of the Brexit referendum, even musing that other countries should consider following the UK out of the EU.

Given his track record, Trump will undoubtedly try to deepen the EU's internal divisions, by playing its eastern flank against its western members. The Hungarian and Polish governments are both eager to advance their projects of "illiberal democracy." And we can expect to see Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Poland's unelected *de facto* ruler, Jarosław Kaczyński, gladly indulge Trump's bigotry; indeed, it will be music to their ears.

Trump's simplistic, xenophobic rhetoric will also find a sympathetic audience among Poles and Hungarians who fear large-scale immigration. In recent years, large swaths of Central and Eastern Europe's electorates have been mobilised

by populist rhetoric, and the region's governments have refused to cooperate with the EU's collective response to the refugee crisis. While polls suggest that Western European electorates are coming back around to supporting European integration and pro-European reformers, this positive mood has not yet reached Central and Eastern Europe, where suspicion toward the EU remains strong.

Unfortunately, the political environment in Central and Eastern Europe is ideal for populists who refuse to participate constructively in the European project. Given this, and the very real danger that other countries could pursue their own exit from the bloc, Trump must not be allowed to exacerbate existing divisions. Central Europeans must understand that moving to Europe's periphery will harm their own vital interests, by undermining their ability to influence the future of the continent. It is up to these countries to seek a compromise that enables them to continue participating in and

influencing common policies.

No one has more to gain from a divided Europe than Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has long sought to disrupt the EU by destabilising countries on its eastern periphery. For this reason, the European Commission, the European Council, and the French and German governments need to use all of the means at their disposal to ensure that the rule of law in Central and Eastern Europe is maintained.

At the same time, the European Commission and leading member-state governments should reach out to those in Central and Eastern European countries who still uphold and defend EU ideals. We need to change public opinion and build bridges in policy areas that are currently creating divisions, including migration, posted workers from one country to another within the EU, and energy policy.

With respect to the last of these issues, the EU urgently needs to create a true energy union to reduce its dependence on outside, increasingly hostile countries, not least Russia. And we should develop a credible European Defence Union within NATO, which would strengthen cooperation across the EU and alleviate eastern member states' security concerns.

Within the EU, there is room for compromise on all of these issues. If we can find common ground, we can start to bring the people of Central and Eastern Europe back on board. It is in no one's interest — except, of course, Putin's — to allow any EU member states to be pushed into a corner, and potentially toward the door.

It is now up to Europe's leaders and the Trump administration's more responsible members, such as Secretary of Defence James Mattis, to prevent the US president from harming the EU. To do otherwise would be to risk weakening the Western alliance, upon which global stability and order rests.

The writer, a former Belgian prime minister, is President of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group (ALDE) in the European Parliament.

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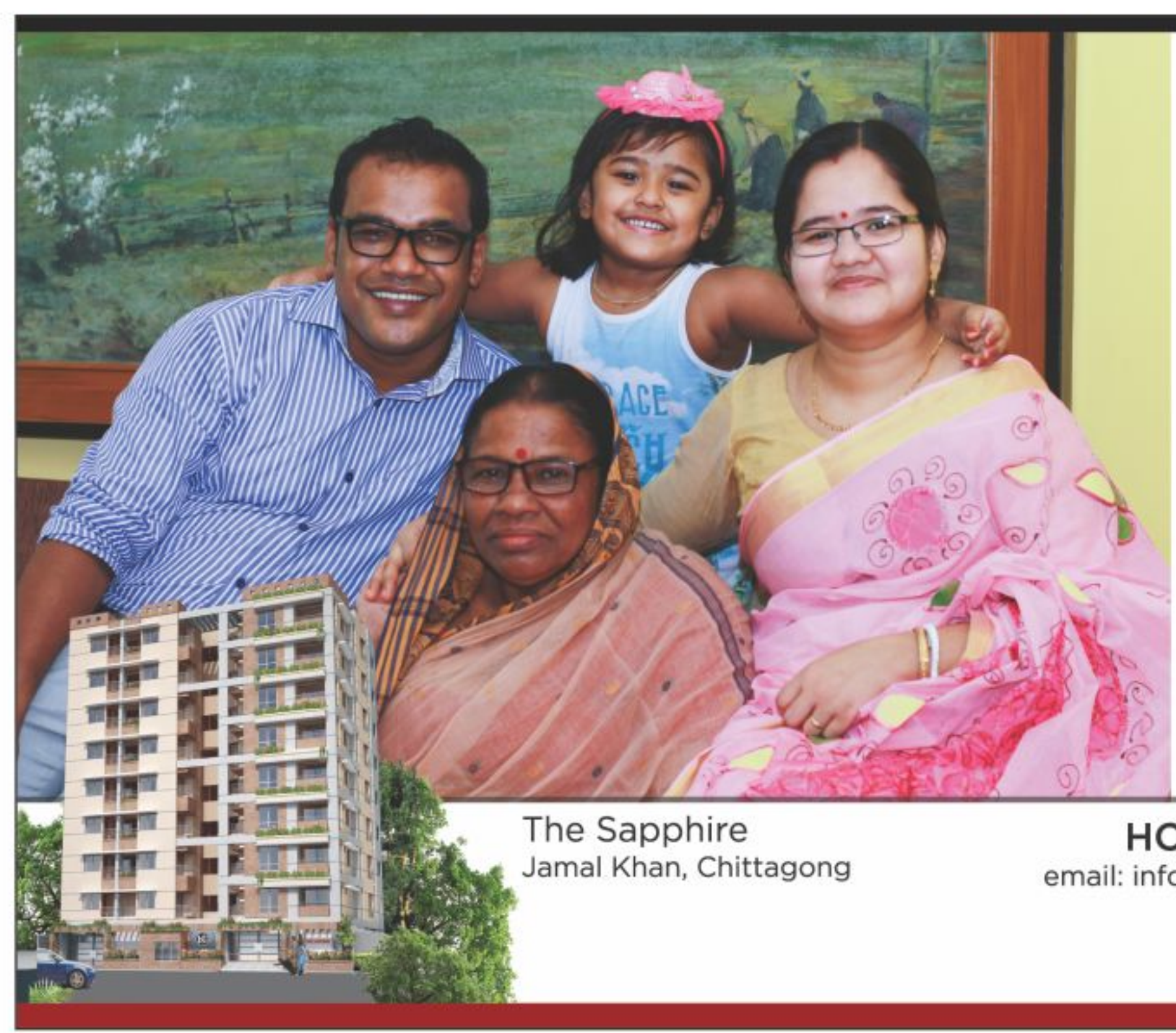
(Exclusive to The Daily Star)

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