



National Day of Switzerland

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Message



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

This year, the Swiss National Day celebration in Bangladesh carries a special significance. In 2017 Switzerland and Bangladesh are celebrating the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Throughout the years, solidarity, mutual respect and cooperation on a wide array of issues have been the basis of our long standing partnership with Bangladesh.

Switzerland was one of the first countries to recognize the independence

of Bangladesh on 13 March, 1972. In 1971, due to its long tradition of neutrality and diplomatic "good offices", Switzerland had represented the diplomatic interests of India in Pakistan, and those of Pakistan in India when the independence war of Bangladesh entered into a decisive phase. During the early days of bilateral relations, Swiss diplomatic presence in Bangladesh was maintained through cross-accreditations. The first Swiss diplomatic presence in independent Bangladesh was stationed at the then Intercontinental Hotel in 1972 in Dhaka. With an objective to support the war torn country to rebuild itself, Switzerland started providing Bangladesh with Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief support right after its independence. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Switzerland's international cooperation agency within the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, formally started its journey in Bangladesh in 1981. In 2005, following an increased engagement with Bangladesh in business and development cooperation, the Swiss representation in Bangladesh was upgraded to a fully functional embassy with a resident Ambassador based in the country.

The overall goal of the Swiss development cooperation in Bangladesh has been to contribute to the improvement of well-being for the poor and disadvantaged people in Bangladesh. At present Bangladesh is one of the priority countries of SDC with focus on Skills Development, Market Development and Local Governance. Switzerland is currently elaborating its Bangladesh development cooperation strategy for 2018-2021 identifying priority areas. The objective of the new strategy will be to support Bangladesh in achieving

inclusive and sustainable growth and in becoming a more equitable society. Switzerland will work towards deepening collaboration with Bangladesh on the implementation of Agenda 2030.

Trade has been a major pillar of the recent remarkable growth in our relations. Bilateral trade between Switzerland and Bangladesh recorded an impressive 16% growth in 2016 and Swiss imports from Bangladesh during this period increased by 25%. The trade volume has more than doubled since 2010 and it is well on course to cross USD 1 billion mark in coming years. Swiss private sector is expanding its cooperation with Bangladesh in new areas such as communication and energy sectors, providing new technology and solutions.

Switzerland is a major foreign investor worldwide and in Bangladesh as well. Major Swiss multinational companies have been present in Bangladesh for a long time. These Swiss companies have made investments in several crucial sectors such as pharmaceutical, chemical, food, construction and services etc. and are regularly expanding their investments. Small and medium sized Swiss businesses, which are the backbone of the Swiss economy, are also gradually becoming interested in doing business with Bangladesh. Taking all these developments into account, it is my firm belief that the Swiss-Bangladesh trade and investment will reach new heights in the coming years.

Another cornerstone of the Swiss economy with strong international ties is the financial sector. The last years have been marked by a significant increase of transparency and accountability in order to effectively

fight tax evasion and avoidance. Switzerland has successfully implemented all relevant international standards of the OECD, the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes or the Financial Action Task Force and cooperates intensely with these and other international bodies. Switzerland is amongst the 100 jurisdictions around the world that have committed to implement the international standard on automatic exchange of information in tax matters. As a consequence Switzerland enacted laws and regulations to introduce the automatic exchange of financial account information in tax matters and has entered into agreements to automatically exchange information with jurisdictions around the world. In addition, Switzerland has also implemented measures to fight base erosion and profit shifting, to combat money laundering or to fight corruption. The Swiss financial sector today is highly competitive while being compliant with international standards.

Bilateral political and cultural exchanges are also burgeoning rapidly. Since 2013, the foreign ministries of the two countries have been holding regular political consultations. The third edition of the consultation took place in Switzerland this year, where the two countries discussed ways to further strengthen bilateral ties. On various global issues, for example migration and climate change, the two countries are also working closely in international fora.

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 swore the oath of confederation, and agreed to act

unitedly to protect their freedom. As you can imagine, today's Switzerland is a completely different country compared to 1291. As the Swiss President Doris Leuthard recently stated Switzerland today wants to be a country that provides effective services to all its citizens. It wants to be a country in which all people can exert their democratic rights in a fully informed manner, independently and with freedom. Switzerland did not allow a separation between an elite and the people because all of us constitute the people. Our multicultural and multilingual identity, the diversity of political opinions, open discussions and public debates are what make our country strong and ready to embrace future.

Bangladesh has embarked upon a remarkable journey towards development and prosperity. The country has attained impressive socio-economic achievements over the last decades in various sectors. Bangladesh's ambitions for 2021 as a Middle Income Country require inclusive and sustainable transition leaving no one behind, a challenge that cannot be missed. Switzerland values its longstanding friendship and cooperation with Bangladesh and looks forward to a continued partnership with Bangladesh based on mutual trust and a shared vision for the future of our countries. I am confident that our multifaceted cooperation will expand and deepen even further in the near future.

I take this opportunity to convey my most sincere wishes to the people of Bangladesh for a prosperous future. I express the hope of a continued enhancing of the friendly relations between our two countries.



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45 Years of Bilateral Relationship



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