

Message from the Ambassador



Dear Readers,


We have embarked upon a new journey in 2019 with the hope that the friendship and the bilateral relations between Switzerland and Bangladesh will continue to grow. Bangladesh continues to remain a priority country for Switzerland’s development cooperation strategy with its focus on key areas such as income and economic development, democratic governance, safer migration for Bangladeshi expat workers and humanitarian aid for the ongoing Rohingya crisis.

The first quarter of this year has been crucial for us as we prepared for the fourth edition of biennial bilateral political consultations between the foreign ministries of Switzerland and Bangladesh that was held during the first week of April. A five-member delegation from Switzerland held talks with the Government of Bangladesh to evaluate the current status and further strengthen the bilateral relations in the areas of economy, development, Sustainable Development Goals and humanitarian cooperation. The delegation has also visited Cox’s Bazar for a day to gain first-hand impression on the refugee crisis in that region. Both the countries also held consultations about a wide range of multilateral, regional and global topics of mutual interest.

I hope you will enjoy reading this first issue of Swiss Talk 35 this year. We are happy that we have been with you to share the joy of the colorful and the ever so festive Bengali New Year 1426. Thank you very much!

René Holenstein

Ambassador of Switzerland to Bangladesh

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Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh

**Switzerland – Bangladesh
Political Consultations 2019**

The bilateral political consultations between the two countries were held in Dhaka on 02 April 2019. A five-member Swiss delegation arrived in Dhaka from Bern on 31 March to participate in the talks. Ambassador Raphael Nägeli, the Assistant State Secretary for Asia-Pacific of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, and Ambassador Kamrul Ahsan, Secretary (Bilateral and Consular) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, led the respective delegations during the consultations. The two sides exchanged views on socio-economic developments and human rights. Global topics including Agenda 2030, Climate Change, Universal Periodic Review and recent developments in various regional were also discussed.

Ambassador Nägeli and the Swiss delegation, which also included Ambassador Thomas Gass, the Assistant Director General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, paid courtesy calls to the Honourable International Affairs Adviser to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, H.E. Dr. Gowher Rizvi and the Principal Coordinator for SDG Affairs in the Prime Minister’s Office, Mr. Md. Abul Kalam Azad. The delegation also met with the representatives of the civil society, business, diplomatic community, International Organizations and INGOs during their stay in Dhaka.



During their stay in Bangladesh, the Swiss delegation travelled to the Rohingya refugee camps on 01 April 2019 and observed that all efforts towards resolving the crisis must be guided by respect for obligations under international laws, particularly human rights law; and that the safe and dignified return of the Rohingyas are addressed in an effective and comprehensive manner. Since 2017, Switzerland has committed more than US\$30 million in humanitarian aid to alleviate the sufferings of the Rohingya refugees as well as the host communities. Ambassador Nägeli has reiterated that Switzerland has a strong commitment to stay engaged with Bangladesh and the affected Rohingya refugees through both humanitarian and development assistance.

Some members of the Swiss delegation have also travelled to Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj on 03-04 April 2019 to visit a number of development projects supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC.

Swiss Film Screenings

During the month of March, the Embassy has supported the screening two famous Swiss films at the 12th edition of the International Children's Film Festival Bangladesh and at the Francophonie Week 2019 in Dhaka.



The famous award-winning Swiss family film, Heidi, was screened at the Children's Film Festival. Heidi is a 2015 film directed by Alain Gsponer and is an adaptation of the famous novel by Johanna Spyri that goes by the same name.

The screening was attended by a large number of young audiences at the Central Public Library auditorium in Dhaka.

At the Francophonie Week, a highly acclaimed French-speaking Swiss film, Fortuna (2018), directed by Germain Roaux, was screened. A large and diverse audience group attended the screening that took place at the Dhanmondi branch of Alliance Française of Dhaka on 22 March. The eventful screening was followed by a networking reception for the audience.

Both the films star the internationally renowned and revered Swiss actor, Bruno Ganz, who had passed away in February 2019. The late actor was a legend in the world of cinema and theatrics, and left behind 50 years' worth of contribution to art, television and the entertainment industry. In a way, the screenings of these films in Dhaka have served as a tribute to his great performances.

SHARIQUE – SDC Project Impact evaluation

An impact assessment study of the Swiss Development Cooperation funded project "SHARIQUE", that is implemented by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, has shed light on the systemic changes brought about by the project in relation to citizen empowerment, strengthening local government institutions and improving the quality and appropriateness of public



services. Through this intervention, the Local Government Institutions (LGI) implement their mandates in a more effective transparent, accountable and inclusive manner and the citizen groups influence the delivery of services provided by the local government institutions. The two tangible outcomes of this study show that SHARIQUE has been very successful in capability building by providing LGIs and citizens with the needed skills, and has created opportunities through grants and increased tax collection. The project has further supported a strong tax-paying culture in its intervention areas. This culture, in particular, has led to the citizens to become more engaged in public services and demand a say in how their tax funds are being utilized. There has also been considerable and visible increase in the number of women who have been assuming leadership roles through the SHARIQUE project. The elected female members feel that they could become more involved with the LGI activities and hence contribute to improving public service delivery in their communities.

Swiss Bangla Inter - Agency Committee 2019

On the sidelines of the political consultations held between Switzerland and Bangladesh, the Swiss delegation held an exchange with the inter-agency committee of the Government of Bangladesh at the Ministry of Commerce on 02 April. The two sides reviewed the progress made in the area of bilateral economic relations, discussed some specific business issues and ways to further enhance bilateral economic and business relations.



The inter-agency committee was formed in September 2018 as a follow up measure to the Swiss Presidential visit of February 2018 with the aim to promote bilateral trade and investment between Switzerland and Bangladesh. The economic relations between Switzerland and Bangladesh are growing rapidly. The bilateral trade volume stood at CHF 713.86 million in 2018 that has almost tripled since 2010. At the meeting, the delegations agreed that economy has become one of the main pillars of the Swiss-Bangla bilateral relations and many Swiss companies have large investments in crucial sectors of Bangladesh including pharmaceuticals, chemicals, agro-food industries and construction business, etc. Bangladesh is quickly becoming an important destination for the Swiss Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and the two countries have further agreed upon identifying new areas of economic cooperation (e.g. hi-tech, clean-tech, renewable energy, etc) where both countries can mutually benefit from the collaboration.

Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh

Contact/ feedback:

Shafina Alam, email: shafina.alam@eda.admin.ch