

Message from the Ambassador




Welcome to the 31st edition of Swiss Talk. It is the first issue of Swiss Talk being published after my arrival in Bangladesh. Therefore, I take this opportunity to convey my best wishes to our friends in Bangladesh and elsewhere. It will be my honour and privilege to contribute to the further strengthening of the relations between our two countries and people during my tenure in Bangladesh.

Switzerland and Bangladesh enjoy long standing and excellent bilateral relations. In 2017, Switzerland and Bangladesh celebrated 45 years of bilateral relations between the two countries. A special celebratory event was organized in November in Dhaka to cherish our achievements and renew our commitments to work together for a better future.

Switzerland remains deeply concerned about the humanitarian crisis facing the Rohingya population and commends the Government and the people of Bangladesh for the assistance and protection offered to the Rohingya refugees on humanitarian grounds. Switzerland has taken up a number of measures to provide humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya population. You will find more information about our humanitarian efforts in this newsletter.

Thank you very much and best wishes for 2018!

René Holenstein
Ambassador of Switzerland to Bangladesh

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Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh

Bangladesh, Switzerland celebrate 45 years of friendship

To celebrate the 45 years of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Bangladesh in a festive mood, the Embassy of Switzerland, in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh, organized a special celebratory event in Dhaka on 02 November 2017. The Hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, H.E. Mr. Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali graced the event as the Chief Guest, while the Hon'ble Minister for Cultural Affairs, H.E. Mr. Asaduzzaman Noor attended the event as the Special Guest.



In his welcome address, the Ambassador of Switzerland Mr. René Holenstein underpinned that Switzerland has been a longstanding partner of Bangladesh introducing innovative ideas and solutions. The Hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh in his address highlighted that Switzerland remains a tested partner of Bangladesh in its socio-economic strides.

Main attractions of the event were presentations of young people of Bangladesh and Switzerland sharing their aspirations for the future. Ambassador René Holenstein handed over a copy of a historic document to the Hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs, which laid the foundation of the relations between Switzerland and Bangladesh. The guests enjoyed Bangladeshi folklore dance performed by Rupantar, while the popular Bangladeshi band Chirkut enthralled the audience with their tunes. The event was organized in cooperation with the private sector.

Ambassador René Holenstein presents his credentials

Ambassador René Holenstein presented his credentials to the Honourable President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, H.E. Mr. Md. Abdul Hamid, at Bangabhaban on the 26th of September, 2017. Welcoming the ambassador, the President of Bangladesh assured him of cooperation in discharging

his duties. Ambassador Holenstein conveyed Switzerland's commitment to stand beside Bangladesh, support its ambitions for a prosperous future and an inclusive society, as well as its humanitarian efforts in times of need.

Switzerland commits CHF 8 million for Rohingya refugees

Switzerland is deeply concerned about the ongoing Rohingya refugee crisis. To support Bangladesh in responding to this crisis of unprecedented scale, Switzerland has contributed CHF 8 million in humanitarian aid. The Humanitarian Aid Department of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC has already allocated the funds to the operations run by the several UN agencies and NGOs. Switzerland has provided tents and other emergency in kind supplies to the most vulnerable Rohingya refugees. Five Swiss experts are also currently supporting international agencies operating in Cox's Bazar.

High level Swiss official visits Cox's Bazar

The head of the Department of Humanitarian Aid of Switzerland, Ambassador Manuel Bessler, paid a visit to Bangladesh to obtain a first-hand impression of the latest influx of the displaced Rohingya population into Cox's Bazar and the related humanitarian crisis. On 01-03 October he visited a number of Rohingya settlements in Cox's Bazar and met with relevant stakeholders during the trip.



Ambassador René Holenstein accompanied Mr. Bessler during his visit to the Rohingya settlements. "Switzerland is deeply concerned about the current humanitarian crisis," Mr. Bessler said while visiting a Rohingya settlement of new arrivals in Palong Khali. "The challenges I witness here are unprecedented in scale. Therefore, it is very important to devise a well-coordinated response by all actors and extend their support to all those in need, including the local communities."

Global Compact for Migration

The Global Compact for Migration (GCM) aims to establish an inter-governmentally negotiated agreement to cover all dimensions of international migration. In order to instill a national level understanding of Bangladesh's migration priorities ahead of the regional GCM meeting, IOM and ILO

supported the Government of Bangladesh to bring together relevant stakeholders for a national consultation on 26 October. Ambassador René Holenstein attended the consultation as a Special Guest and mentioned that while Bangladesh benefits from remittances it is also important to underline that many Bangladeshi migrants are working in vulnerable conditions abroad. The organization of the national consultation was supported by SDC. Read more about the Global Compact: <https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration>

Seedstars Dhaka 2017

The third Dhaka edition of Seedstars World start-up competition was held on 23 September. Based in Geneva, Seedstars World is organizing a leading international start-up competition focusing on emerging markets, including Bangladesh. Start-up company CMED won the Seedstars Dhaka 2017 award. CMED will participate in the Seedstars Summit in Lausanne in 2018, where it will compete with start-ups from all over the world for equity investment of up to \$1 million. Another start-up company REPTO won the Swiss Embassy Award. Since 2015, this award is given to start-ups who present a business model at Seedstars Dhaka with the biggest potential to have a social impact.

Indigenous youth conference on human rights

A three day Indigenous Youth Conference 2017 was held in Srimangal, Moulvobazar on 16-18 October. More than 30 indigenous youth leaders and activists participated in this conference which aimed to improve the capacity and knowledge of the participants on international human rights instruments & institutions and globally emerging issues (including SDGs) related to the protection and promotion of human rights of the indigenous people. The Swiss Embassy supported Kapaeng Foundation, a human rights organization working on indigenous people's rights in Bangladesh, in organizing this event.

Exhibition on Bangladeshi architecture

A major and extensive architectural exhibition on Bangladesh was inaugurated in Switzerland on 01 December. The Swiss Architecture Museum in Basel, in collaboration with the Bengal Institute for Architecture, Landscapes and Settlements, is organizing this exhibition on Bangladesh's contemporary architecture called "Bengal Stream: The Vibrant Architecture Scene of Bangladesh." The exhibition brings the work of over thirty architects from Bangladesh. Following Basel, the exhibition will travel to other key cities and museums in Europe before it will be shown in Dhaka.

Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh

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