

Yearly Report- 2018 on the activities of the High Commission of Bangladesh to Nigeria

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Bangladesh High Commission in Abuja was opened in November, 2016 and has been working actively to promote interests of Bangladesh in Nigeria which is the largest economy and democracy of Africa and 6th largest producer of oil in the world.

Bilateral/Political:

Strengthening bilateral relations with Nigeria had been the driver of all the activities of the Mission during the period under review. H.E. Md. Shameem Ahsan,ndc, the High Commissioner, presented Letter of Credence to the Nigerian President H.E. Mr. Muhammadu Buhari on 18 October, 2018 which helped him interact with the high dignitaries of the host country. He met a host of important Ministers including the Honorable Foreign Minister Mr. Jeffrey Onyeama . The High Commissioner also met few influential state Governors. During the meetings, both sides discussed about ways and means to strengthen bilateral relations. The Mission remained active to pursue signing of the proposed Memorandum of Understanding(MoUs)/Agreements with the host country.

Commercial/Economic:

Pursuing economic contents of diplomacy has been one of the focused areas of the High Commission as there are huge potentials(medicines, textiles & RMG, jute bags for packaging cocoa beans and cashew nuts, ceramic and leather products) of enhancing commercial links between the two countries. Apart from meeting the Minister for Trade and relevant high Officials, the High Commissioner held meetings with the top Executives of a good number of Chambers of Commerce in Abuja and in the outlying cities who equally showed keen interest to forge strong commercial relationship. The High Commissioner received a good number of business leaders at the Chancery and briefed them about business and investment potentials of Bangladesh. They were extensively briefed about excellent investment climate in Bangladesh while urging them to import from the country. The High Commissioner visited important Trade Fairs as a part of market intelligence and kept the Ministry informed. The latest figure released by EPB shows that export to Nigeria, which is still very modest, witnessed upward trend i.e. from US\$ 3.50 million during FY 2016-17 to US\$ 5.13 during the FY 2017-

18 which is encouraging. There has also been increased demand of business visas in recent months which indicates the growing interest about Bangladeshi products among the Nigerian business community. In view of the huge potentials of the expansion of market of Bangladeshi products and as a part of Mission's commercial drive, the High Commission is in the process of launching a **Commercial Display Room** at the Chancery with its modest resources which will go a long way in showcasing the exportables to the visitors/potential importers and investors.

Public Diplomacy:

Bangladesh is little known in West Africa and does not figure prominently in this part of the world. As such, projecting Bangladesh in a positive manner had been one of the top priorities of the Mission. The High Commissioner has been meeting the opinion leaders, members of the civil society, academics, among others, to brief about Bangladesh and sensitise them on important issues like Rohingya refugees who have been fleeing and still fleeing their homeland Myanmar to escape from persecution and atrocities. The High Commission took a number of initiatives recently to project Bangladesh positively which are as under:

Bangladesh Wins Two Awards at the INAC Expo

Bangladesh High Commission in Abuja in collaboration with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Government of Bangladesh actively participated at the **11th International Arts and Crafts (INAC) Expo** organized by the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) of Nigeria (17-24 November, 2018). Twenty three foreign entities including eighteen Embassies/High Commissions, various agencies of the Nigerian Government and a large number of local organizations participated at the mega event which was visited by hundreds of visitors each day. Bangladesh High Commission put up a beautiful Pavilion, one of the largest, which was colourfully decorated with traditional articles, handicrafts and artefacts. The High Commission also organized a special event entitled **Bangladesh Day** on the side line of the Expo to showcase Bangladesh's rich culture and tradition. Spectacular performance by the dance artists from Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy mesmerized few hundred foreign guests. Bangladesh Pavilion was ranked one of the two "Best Designed Pavilion" alongwith India and also shared "Best Networking Strategy" recognition with

India. A 9-member delegation from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs from Bangladesh participated at the Expo.

Liberation War-based Bangladeshi film screened at the Asian Film Festival for the first time

Bangladesh High Commission participated at the **Second Asian Film Festival** (10-14 December, 2018) in Abuja, Nigeria. Ten countries including Bangladesh participated at the yearly gala. Drawn on a story against the backdrop of the great War of Liberation in 1971, RINA BROWN, a Bangladeshi movie was screened, as nominated by the line Ministry, which earned appreciation among the enlightened audience. The High Commission also put up a Stall on the side-line of the Festival and various publications on Bangladesh including on war of liberation and tourism potentials and a good number of traditional articles along with jute-made items were on display. Guests were served with traditional finger food.

Participation at Annang Festival of Arts & Culture (AFAC) 2018

Bangladesh High Commission participated at the AFAC 2018 themed under “Annang Cultures Beyond the National Frontier” organized by NTO Annang Foundation Inc. (20-23 December 2018, Akwa Ibom State). Few foreign organisations along with a good number of local companies participated. The High Commission put up a stall where a large number of traditional handicrafts and artefacts along with publications were on display which drew huge crowd. The High Commission received an Award in recognition to its participation in a big way.

Cultivating Media and the Civil Society:

The period witnessed increased interaction with the media (both print and electronic) which brought dividends. The High Commissioner met almost all the CEOs/Editors of the Media Houses in Abuja and briefed them about Bangladesh. The visits generated lots of interest about Bangladesh among them. He also gave interview to local media houses including for the Radio Stations. The High Commissioner used those platforms to explain government policies while trying to dispel misperceptions. Influential local Daily Leadership carried two stories on the Hon’ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, among others, positively highlighting her profile illustrated by photographs.

Consular & Welfare:

MRP/PRV services have been installed at the High Commission in June, 2018. There has been visible increase of the demand of visas. The Mission ensured quick and efficient visa delivery (within 2 days) which was appreciated by the foreigners. The Mission has been maintaining close contact with the small but vibrant Bangladesh community which comprises about 200 members. The High Commissioner along with the other Officials regularly interacted with the community members to enquire about their wellbeing in addition to attending community events. The Mission took prompt action to get release of few illegally trafficked stranded nationals who were detained by the local immigration. Nigerian Immigration authorities were found always cooperative in this regard. The community was encouraged to cultivate friendship with the Nigerian leaders and important personalities to create better understanding between the peoples of the two friendly countries.

Sending Report to the Ministry:

The Mission, despite manpower constraints, has been trying to send weekly, political, commercial and special reports to the Ministry and relevant communications were also endorsed to the line Ministries/bodies.

Observing National Events:

The Mission actively organized all major national events with the participation of the community as well as foreigners. The Mission appreciates support of the Ministry in this regard.

Organising 4th National Development Fair:

The High Commission organised **4th National Development Fair** at a local reputed hotel (Fraser Suites) on 4 October, 2018 in a big way. Expatriate Bangladesh nationals and a large number of senior officials from the Nigerian Government, diplomats, members of the Nigerian and foreign media and business & Chamber leaders, representatives from the civil society were present, among others.

Distribution of Christmas & New Year Gifts :

The High Commission distributed gifts to a large numbers of important persons including Nigerian dignitaries, members of the civil society & think-tanks,

business/chamber leaders and other important persons on the eve of Christmas and English New Year-2019. Diaries & Calendars, received from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, were used one of the items of gifts which were well received.

Administrative:

The Chancery, functioning in a rented property in posh Asokoro area, got a face-lifting which now gives an ambience of the sending country. The Mission has already written to the Ministry for consideration of the proposals to purchase properties both for the Chancery as well as for the Residence of the High Commissioner.

Challenges and opportunities :

Security remains a major challenge for Nigeria. Malaria is also a major health hazard. But it is also a fact that many foreign countries including a good number of Asian countries have developed mutually beneficial & strong (commercial) relationship with Nigeria. Statistics released by the NBS (National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria) show that India was Nigeria's largest trading partner in the third quarter of 2018 followed by Spain, France, Netherlands and China. India-Nigeria both way yearly trade stand at around US\$ 12 billion. Investing in Nigeria or forging strong commercial links, despite negative public perception among certain quarters, can bring huge profits eventually but Bangladeshi exporters/investors should overcome the perceived negative impression about Africa as many countries have been aggressively pursuing their commercial drive including seeking both inbound & outbound investments. Furthermore, the Nigerians are generally very friendly and warm people and extremely well-mannered contrary to the public perception.

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Bilateral/Political:

- The High Commissioner met a good number of dignitaries(Vice President, Women Affairs Minister, State Foreign Minister), elected officials including Speaker of the Assembly, Chairmen of the Foreign Affairs Committee, influential Governors, Assemblymen, Senators, high officials (Permanent) Secretaries, Service Chiefs (Army, Air and Navy & Intelligence), Immigration Chief, IGP & opinion leaders, among others, to cultivate friendship & brief about Bangladesh and sensitise them on important issues.
- There has been visible progress in signing MoUs/Agreements on FOC, cooperation in the fields of Agriculture and Education, among others.

Multilateral:

- A 2-member Bangladesh delegation from the M/o Health and Family welfare participated at the Inaugural Consultation Meeting of the D8 Health and Social Protection Programme held on 19-20 June,2019 in Abuja.
- The Mission strongly lobbied for all candidates of Bangladesh and also kept close contact with the Nigerian Government on Rohingya issue and Nigeria voted in favour of the UNGA Resolution on Myanmar adopted on 14 November,2019.

Economic Diplomacy:

- The Mission launched a **Commercial Display Room** at the Chancery with a wide collection of exportables as a part of its commercial drive to showcase the export potentials of Bangladesh to the visitors/potential importers and investors.
- This Mission actively participated at 06 (Six) Trade Fairs during the year 2019 in Abuja, Lagos and other outlying cities utilising the exhibits of its Commercial Display Room. Bangladesh received **Best Foreign Exhibitor Award** at the Abuja International Trade Fair (21 September-2 October,2019) and **Best Foreign Participant Award** at the 40th Kaduna International Trade Fair (29 March-7 April 2019).
- During the Independence and National day Reception (2019) held at a five star hotel, the Mission put up a large Stall (Bangladesh Corner) in the Hall in which an array of exportables were on display.
- Tea-sets (Made in Bangladesh) were handed over to the CEOs of the prominent Stores in Nigeria in addition to the potential importers. Jute-bags (Hessian, btwell) were also given to both public and private sector representatives as it has huge demand in the local market.

Public Diplomacy:

- The High Commissioner hosted 06 (Six) interactive meetings/Receptions with the presence of the journalists, academics, members of the civil society, trade and investment leaders, among others, to portray a positive image of Bangladesh.
- The High Commissioner met almost all the CEOs/Editors of the Media Houses in Abuja and Lagos and briefed them extensively on Bangladesh and on Rohingya issue, among others. He also gave interviews to local media houses including TV and Radio. Influential local Daily Leadership carried two stories on the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, among others, positively highlighting her achievements. Well-respected "Acclaim Nigeria Magazine" carried a special feature story on Bangladesh in 2019.
- Four Nigerian journalists attended the "Visit Bangladesh Programme" organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dhaka in April and December, 2019. They already published a good number of positive articles on Bangladesh. Two Nigerian academics/resource persons visited Bangladesh to attend "The Dhaka Global Dialogue" in November,2019.

- A multi-colour, 3-pager Special Supplement, first time by the Mission, was published in the influential Daily Leadership to mark the Independence and National Day (2019).
- The Mission encourages visits to the Chancery by young Nigerians. Eighteen students including four teachers from local school visited the Chancery in 2019 to familiarise themselves with Bangladesh.

Cultural Diplomacy:

- The Mission took the initiative and a 19-member delegation with members from the M/o Cultural Affairs & MOFA participated for the first time at the “Carnival Calabar” (27-29 December,2019) known as the “Africa’s Biggest Street Party” and showcased cultural beauty of Bangladesh.
- A 10-member team comprising members from the M/o Cultural Affairs & MOFA actively participated at the 12th International Arts and Crafts (INAC) Expo,20-24 November,2019 and received **Best Designed Pavilion Award**. Artists (vocal, flute & dance) from Bangladesh also performed at the “Bangladesh Day” event on 23 November 2019 on the sideline of the 12th INAC before few hundred foreign guests.
- Bangladesh High Commission and National Council of Arts and Culture (NCAC) of Nigeria jointly organised a “Bangladesh-Nigeria Cultural Night” and launched “Nigeria-Bangladesh Friendship Club” on 26 November 2019 in Abuja at which artists from both countries performed. Prof. Ibrahim Agboola Gambari, former Nigerian Foreign Minister and ex-Ambassador and Permanent Representative to UN and Under Secretary General of the UNSG, Mr. Md. Shameem Ahsan, High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Nigeria and Mr. Otunba Olusegun Runsewe, Director General, NCAC jointly cut the cake to mark the launching. It symbolized the beginning of a new relationship between Bangladesh and Nigeria.

- **Military/Defence:**

Over 230 Nigerian Defence Officers received training at various Defence Institutions in Bangladesh so far (28 in 2019) while three Bangladeshi Officers (two Brigadier Generals and one Major) received training in Nigeria in 2019.

Preparatory Work for the celebration of Mujib Borsho:

The Mission has launched **Bangabandhu Corner** as a part of the year-long(17 March,2020-17 March,2021) celebration of the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Mujib Year) with due honor and festivity. Relevant publications etc. and paintings are prominently on display while the surrounding area has already assumed a festive look.

Diaspora Diplomacy:

- Operationalization of the “Dutabash” Mobile Application.
- Launching of a pilot number (+234-816736-1027) to reach the Mission Officials (24/7/365).
- Suggestion/Complain Box has been introduced at the Chancery.
- Pursued with the concerned authorities in Bangladesh on receipt of complain etc. from expatriates about alleged illegal occupation of their properties/any grievances in the home country.
- Occasional visits to Detention Centres in Nigeria.
- Sending one Officer to Kinshasa, DRC to extend urgent consular service following the death of AIG Rowshan Ara Begum in a road accident on 5 May,2019 as per the instruction of the Ministry.
- Creation of a WhatsApp Group for the Bangladesh Community in Nigeria to keep them updated with important information/notifications on the welfare of NRBs etc. invitations/important developments/dissemination of Daily News Brief each day.
- Distribution of Bangla Books to the children of the expatriate Bangladeshi families and sharing publications/periodicals of the Government among the community.

Others:

- The Mission actively organised all major national events with the presence of the community as well as foreigners. Artistes from 07 languages performed at the IMLD event in 2019.
- Weekly and special reports (political, commercial etc.) were sent to the Ministry and relevant communications were also endorsed to the line Ministries/bodies.

- The Chancery has been tastefully decorated with a number of roll-up-banners at the entrance, visitor's area and around containing pictorial description of Bangladesh's success stories. Framed pictures reflecting history, tourism, cultural heritage, investment and economic potentials of the country have also been placed prominently. The new look strongly conveys the ambience of the sending country.

Challenges and Opportunities :

- Bangladeshi business community needs to explore the untapped potentials of the country of 200 million people as a good number of Asian countries have developed mutually beneficial & strong (commercial) relationship with Nigeria.

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