

50 years: A new era of Brit Bangla Bondhon

On this day, 50 years ago, the UK and Bangladesh established our diplomatic relationship. On behalf of the UK, I congratulate the people and the government of Bangladesh on this historic anniversary of a new era of Brit Bangla Bondhon.

As British High commissioner in Bangladesh, I am proud that the UK played such a key role in Bangladesh's founding story. Before Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman set foot in his liberated homeland, his historic trip to the UK in January 1972 and his meeting with UK PM Edward Heath forged a new friendship and accelerated the recognition of Bangladesh as an independent nation. This historic moment encouraged Commonwealth countries to recognise Bangladesh. I also recall Her Majesty's Government's humanitarian relief contributions to a rising Bangladesh before, during and after the liberation war. In fact, The UK was one of the largest donors for humanitarian relief support to the people of Bangladesh in 1971, reflecting strong public support in the UK for the liberation cause. All this laid the foundations for a unique and lasting relationship between the UK and Bangladesh.

With the establishment of a British High Commission in Dhaka, the then UK Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home visited Bangladesh in 1972. Since then, the UK has been a committed partner of this country in research, health services and community development, disaster risk reduction, poverty alleviation, improving education, increasing life expectancy for women and children, and womens' empowerment. And all this has helped the country's remarkable progress over the last 50 years.

As Bangladesh continued to grow as an independent nation through the mid-1970s, the UK began to diversify its cooperation. We helped with capacity building for Bangladesh military staff, police, and government officials. In 1977, the UK supported Bangladesh in setting up a Military Staff College at Savar. In 1978, the then UK Prime Minister James Callaghan visited Bangladesh. Many Bangladeshis made the UK their home, and after five decades, with around 600,000 people of Bangladeshi origin living in the UK, the relationship between the British and Bangladeshi peoples is deeper and stronger than ever.

Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II came to Bangladesh in 1983, when she travelled by train to visit a model village 35 miles south of Dhaka. Since that event, several Royal family members including HRH The Prince of Wales, HRH The Princess Royal, and Prime Ministers including John Major, Tony Blair and David Cameron have visited Bangladesh to witness a rising country. Through this time, the relationship has deepened, reflecting keen UK interest as Bangladesh has pursued recovery from poverty, floods, and devastating cyclones. The country has moved forward, a role model of positive transformation while continuing to grapple with political and governance challenges as a vibrant, independent nation.

I am happy to reflect on Bangladesh's transformation from "one of the world's poorest countries" into "one of the world's fastest-growing economies" and the UK's part in that story. Today, the world looks with admiration at what Bangladesh has achieved in its first half century: an RMG powerhouse; a leading contributor to peace and security, especially as a provider of troops to UN peacekeeping missions, and one of the most influential global voices on climate change, as we have just seen at COP26 in Glasgow. The UK is proud to be a friend of Bangladesh through all this.

Modern links between the UK and Bangladesh include trade and investment, the British Bangladeshi contribution to the UK National Health Service, education, development, defence, culture, cricket and curry! We share a mutual vision of a modern 21st century partnership bound by strong historical ties.

We look forward to strengthening these bonds of kinship and culture through the dynamism of our strong people to people links, for the next 50 years and beyond. Brit Bangla Bondhon!

Further information

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