

# Press release: UK Foreign Office Minister Lord Ahmad concludes visit to Bangladesh

Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Minister for the Commonwealth and the United Nations, left Bangladesh today following a two day trip.

As the first UK Minister to visit the country following June's election, Lord Ahmad met the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, and the State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Shahriar Alam and reinforced the UK's commitment to deepening relations and co-operation with Bangladesh across a wide range of issues including trade, development, migration, and the shared challenge of combating terrorism and extremism. He reiterated the UK's hope that the next parliamentary elections would be free, fair and inclusive. His message to Bangladeshi political parties was:

"Number one, please participate and secondly let's have a free, fair and transparent election, because those are foundations for ensuring sustainable democracy for the long term."

Ahead of the Commonwealth Summit in London next year, Lord Ahmad called on Bangladesh to play a leading role. He said:

"The Commonwealth has huge potential to increase its global influence. Britain will be looking at ways to re-invigorate and re-energise this unique institution when London hosts the Commonwealth Summit next April. Bangladesh has a great tale to tell, which should be shared with our partner Commonwealth countries, about the work it has done to empower women and girls through education and employment."

He also discussed the role of the Commonwealth in promoting values such as tolerance, human rights and the rule of law.

Lord Ahmad visited a textile factory to witness a skills development programme for workers in the ready-made garment industry, which is being carried out with UK assistance. The Minister acknowledged the role the garment industry plays in Bangladeshi women's emancipation:

"It's marvellous to see millions of women in Bangladesh becoming self-reliant through employment. This is a driving force behind the country's progress towards middle income status."

Lord Ahmad also addressed a reception for Bangladeshis who had studied in the UK on Chevening and Commonwealth Scholarships. Launching the UK's Chevening scholarship for 2018-2019, Lord Ahmad welcomed the four-fold increase in the number of scholarships since 2014.

## Notes for Editors

- Lord Tariq Mahmood Ahmad is a British businessman, appointed Minister of State for the Commonwealth and United Nations at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 13 June, 2017.
- On January 13, 2011, he was created a life peer, taking the title Baron Ahmad of Wimbledon.
- There are more than 230 Chevening alumni in Bangladesh working in a variety of sectors.
- Over 1600 Commonwealth scholarships have been awarded to Bangladeshi citizens since the programme began in 1960.