

Forex reserves hit record high in January

Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves rose to a record \$18.12 billion at the end of January this from \$18.07 billion of December, 2013, according to a report published in Dhaka recently. The higher reserves, which



stem from a widening current-account surplus, are enough to cover six months of imports. At the end of January 2013, reserves totalled \$13.1 billion. Rising exports and a slowing of imports helped build the reserves despite a drop in inward remittances as the manpower exporting to the Middle East has comparatively declined.

In the first seven months of the current fiscal that will end in June, the central Bank of Bangladesh purchased more than \$2.5 billion from local commercial banks to help keep the local currency stable. In the previous financial year, it bought \$4 billion. Meanwhile, the country's economic pace is expected to slow to less than 6 percent in the current financial year, due to political turmoil. On January 15, World Bank forecasted Gross Domestic Product growth would be at 5.7 percent for the current fiscal. In the previous year, the GDP growth pace of the pace was 6.2 percent.

BASUG-TNU Focus Group Discussions in London: **Lack of trust, political instability hamper Diaspora investment**

Participants at the BASUG-TNU Focus Group Discussions on Remittance for Community in London opined that migrant remittances have both a positive and a negative impact on their communities. While they realize the good it does for individuals, they actually emphasized the potential negative side effects it can have for regional economies (such as regional inflation in case of Sylhet, 40% higher than in rest of country), agriculture (uncultivated agricultural land due to lack of manpower, ownership in hands of migrants who do not cultivate or neglect), and longevity of impact of remittances. "When the paddy is ripe, there is nobody there to cut it". Other issues that came up in the discussions were lack of trust and awareness and political stability.



The group discussions held at Montefiore centre on 21-23 January were participated by different stakeholders including businessmen, entrepreneurs, educationists, social activists, Bangladesh British Chamber of Commerce, journalists, students, political leaders and researchers. Bikash Chowdhury Barua, Chairman of BASUG and Dr Ahmed, Director and Advisor of BASUG and Danielle de Winter, senior Researcher of The Network University travelled to London to attend the discussions which were part of the on-going project, RfCD, supported by Oxfam Novib. Participants said that the lack of trust and a sense of security was one of the main denominators of the (non-) attraction to invest in community projects in Bangladesh. This was either a consequence because of politics (“power games”), or because of disappointments (“misuse of funds”) in



Bangladesh. Corruption at government sectors were mentioned as obstacles to effective investments and potential successes. Emphasis was placed by the participants on the necessity of making sure that people get information on availability of opportunities to invest, and more importantly, know the potential effects their remittances *could* have on the development of the community (and thus for their families). In the discussions sectors of interest that were named included: cold storage (especially, mentioned several times), agriculture in general (due to uncultivated lands and high potential), old care home care. They were also in favour of the concept “collective remittances” and emphasized several times the benefits this could bring in terms of potential of successfully funding a project, shared ownership and responsibility, enhanced network of influence.

Meeting with BBCC & Women Entrepreneurs

The visiting delegation from BASUG and TNU held separate meeting with the leaders of Bangladesh British Chamber of Commerce at BBCC office in London on 29 January 2014. They talked about the future collaboration in the field of diaspora investment and effective engagement of migrants in the community development in Bangladesh. The meeting was attended by Muqim Ahmed, President BBCC, Bashir Ahmed, former Director of BBCC and Shahagir Bakht Faruk, former President of BBCC while Danielle de Winter and Dr Ahmed represented their organisations. Later, they attended a seminar and exhibition organised by Bangladesh British Women Entrepreneurs at Whitechapel Idea Store where Danielle de Winter addressed the gathering. *(Photo: BASUG-TNU delegates (left) are seen with BBCC leaders in London at BBCC office)*



Live TV Talk Show on Migration & Remittance in London

Chairman of BASUG Bikash Chowdhury Barua, senior Researcher of TNU Danielle de Winter and BASUG Country Coordinator in U.K. Ansar Ahmed Ullah took part in a 90-minute live TV talk show at London-based Bangladeshi channel (Channel I) on issues relating to migration and development, with special focus on Remittance. The talk show was moderated by its Director and owner, media personality, Reza Ahmed Faisal Chowdhury. The London programs got wide media publicity in Bengali print and electronic media. *(Photo: Talk show: from right Danielle de Winter, Bikash Chowdhury Barua, Reza Ahmed Faisal Chowdhury & Ansar Ahmed Ullah)*



Dutch support for Garment Village in Bangladesh sought

The Government of Bangladesh has sought the support of the Netherlands Government for setting up the proposed garments' village in Munshiganj district bordering the capital Dhaka. The request was made by the State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, when he met Gerben de Jong, the Ambassador of the Netherlands to Bangladesh, at his office, according to a press release from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Minister Alam thanked the Government of the Netherlands for its contribution to the Better Work Programme aimed at improving working conditions in Bangladesh's readymade garment (RMG) industry. Mentioning the Netherlands as a consistent development partner since the independence of Bangladesh, the State Minister expressed his satisfaction at the existing state of bilateral relations between the two countries. The State Minister requested the Ambassador to encourage Dutch investment in Bangladesh in different sectors, including textiles, leather and leather goods.

During the meeting, the Dutch Ambassador observed that political stability is required for furthering trade and commerce. He further informed that the Development Minister of the Netherlands may visit Bangladesh sometime this year. The meeting ended with the hope that Bangladesh and Netherlands would continue to work for securing their mutual interests. (Courtesy: Bangla News 24)

Bengali New Year celebration 19 April in Amsterdam

BASUG in collaboration with a Bangladeshi cultural organisation based in the Netherlands, Simana Periyé will organise a day long program on 19 April 2014 in Amsterdam to celebrate the Bengali New Year (Bangla Nobo Borsho). A dance group from Bangladesh is scheduled to perform on the day while celebrated mime artist, Ekushey Award winner, Partha Pratim Majumder is likely to present his show. Mr Majumder is the pioneer of mime art in Bangladesh and lives permanently in Paris.

BASUG-TNU members visit Bangladesh on Remittance Program

As a part of the on-going project, Remittance for Community Development (RfCD), BASUG in collaboration with The Network University (TNU) and Oxfam Novib is going to organise 5 separate Round Table Meetings (RTM) in Bangladesh on 23-27 February 2014. Three of the RTMs will be held in Dhaka on 23-25 February while the rest two will be held in Chunarghat and Hobiganj on 26-27 February. In this connection three representatives from BASUG and TNU will be visiting Bangladesh. They are: Professor Gerd Junne, Director of TNU, Danielle de Winter, senior researcher of TNU and Bikash Chowdhury Barua, Chairman of BASUG.

Meeting with Dutch Ambassador

The delegates will hold a separate meeting with the Dutch ambassador, Mr. Gerben de Jong on 25 February at 3 p.m. at the embassy in Dhaka. Senior Advisor of Economic Affairs of the Embassy, Ms Monnujan Khanam will also attend the meeting, according to a message received from the Embassy.

Meet Bangladesh Bank Governor

The delegates will also meet the Governor of the Bangladesh Central Bank, Dr. Aitaur Rahman at his chamber on 24 Feb afternoon. They will discuss the possibility of working together in the field of migration and development with special focus on remittance at home and abroad.

Berlin Workshop: 'Sustainable Development Bangladesh'

An International workshop on "Sustainable Development of Bangladesh" was held in Berlin, Germany on 23 November 2013. It was organized by Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN) Germany, Bengalisches Kultur Forum Berlin, Bangladesh Entwicklungszentrum in Deutschland (BEZ) e.V. Bremen and BASUG-Diaspora and Development, Netherlands.

The topics discussed in the workshop were: a) Socio-economic and community development issues such as agricultural, health, technical, industrial and educational aspects; b) Climate change and Green environment; Energy Production and Supply; c) Migration and development including remittances; and d) Cooperation with governmental and non-governmental Institutions and organisations; and Networking among Non-Residence Bangladeshis (NRBs). The workshop was attended by NRBs living in Germany and other parts of Europe.

The first session was introduced by Mr. Khalid Noman Nomi and Mr. Opu Alam, both from Bengalisches Kultur Forum Berlin. In this session, four experts presented their papers on the above mentioned topics. They are: Prof. Dr. Bibhuty Roy of University of Bremen, Prof. Dr. Muhibur Rahman, Member of the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh Dr. Mazharul M Islam, Senior Research Fellow, University of Bonn, Germany and Mr. Bikash Chowdhury Barua, Chairman of BASUG.



Prof. Dr. Bibhuty Roy of University of Bremen, in his paper titled “Possibilities and Constraints of NRBs (Non-Resident Bangladeshis) to our country Development” focused mainly on Bangladesh’s education, agriculture, health and energy sectors. He discussed the present situation and future challenges and pointed out that joint efforts both by Resident and non-Resident Bangladeshis were important for better future. The NRBs can develop rural production enterprises through cooperatives and support various activities of existing NGOs. Prof Roy shared the success stories of his personal initiatives in Bangladesh such as solar home system, solar based electricity production in the national grid and some in successful local production of solar system, LED lamps etc. It may be mentioned that Prof Roy in collaboration with Khulna City Corporation in Bangladesh initiated a Solar Project in Khulna city which produces 20 KW/hr electricity. Power generated here is utilised in a solar park, solar training centre and the rest is provided to the national grid. Under his guidance, a solar energy production and training centre is being run in Khulna city where people from all over the country come for training.

Flagrant violation of human rights in Middle East



Bangladeshi worker Mohamed is seen inside his tent in Manolada on 18 April 2013, after foremen opened fire on him and other workers. Photo: Reuters

Without human rights, human beings would be no better than two-legged human animals, particularly in the modern society where money speaks louder than anything else and might is proclaimed to be the absolute right!

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) declaration in 1948 consists of 30 Articles dealing with various aspects of human

rights. In essence it declares the rights to education, health, nationality, life, liberty and security of a person under the jurisdiction of a sovereign state. But the most important element is the requirement that the dignity of the human being is to be observed. 48 states signed the convention in 1948, no state opposed it and seven states including Saudi Arabia abstained. The reason Saudi Arabia forwarded for abstention was that it does not agree with Article 18 dealing with ‘the right of an individual to change his or her religion or belief’ and with Article 16 dealing with ‘equal rights to men and women in the marriage’ on grounds of religion. The whole of oil-rich Middle Eastern Muslim States have been violating the UDHR at the behest of Saudi Arabia and carrying on with their age-old tradition of exploitation of workers, barbarism and inhumanity. Saudi migrant workers coming from poor third world countries are routinely subjected to verbal abuse and physical torture. The following video clip will show how a Bangladeshi worker had been subjected to inhuman physical torture by a barbaric Saudi man. <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=541243792621563> This type of torture is not unique to Bangladeshi workers only. It had been going on for decades in a number of

Middle Eastern countries and citizens of a number of countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Philippine, Thailand, Nepal and so forth had been subjected to barbarity. It is not that the governments supplying the manpower are not aware. They are very much aware, but they turn a blind eye. The reasons are manifold, but two most important ones are that the administrative officials recruiting and supplying workers benefit financially from hand-outs and the government as a whole gets foreign currencies from their remittances. We all saw how a large number of Nepalese workers brought in to work in the construction of 2022 World Cup (football) infrastructure in Qatar were exploited. This sort of exploitation and abuse is not limited to Qatar only. In Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE and, in fact, in the whole of Middle East these things had been going on for decades. The world should wake up and expose their criminality and flagrant violation of human rights which all of their countries have signed up to. ([A. Rahman](#) is a Nuclear Safety Specialist. Courtesy: BD News24)

BASUG becomes member of SKEW Consultant Pool of Germany

Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW) has taken an initiative to form a Consultant Pool with representatives from different migrant organisations in Germany. With this aim in view SKEW under the auspices of international development organisation Engagement Global, arranged a day long workshop on 16th November 2013 at Munster in Germany to develop a framework of the consultant pool. BASUG Board Member, AHM Abdul Hai attended the workshop and shared the organisational and professional experience of his organisation in the field of migration and development.



It may be mentioned that SKEW is committed to harness the positive effects of networking development and migration at the local level with the aim of strengthening municipal development cooperation, improving intercultural expertise in communities and promoting integration. This creates a focus on the abilities of migrant organisations (MOs) to build new bridges and establish new links. In the workshop, participants found out a number of potential fields and sectors related to migration, education, capacity building, intercultural exchange, integration and community development through different group discussions. Meanwhile, in order to promote the project ideas and development initiatives of the migrant organisations Engagement Global arranged a 2 days qualifying workshop in Bonn on 23 and 24 November 2013. Head of Migration and Development Section of Forum for Social Innovation (FSI) facilitated the workshops. Among others, Thomas Klein of Engagement Global, Düsseldorf, Project Chief of SKEW Dorea Pfaferrott, Founder and President of La Colombe Engineer Jacques P. Debango, General Secretary of Arab Union of Photographers Fathi Abu Toboul took part in the workshops. *(Photo: Board member of BASUG Germany, AHM Abdul Hai (6th from right) is seen with the participants in the workshop.)*

UCUMUN Conference on Africa held

University College Utrecht Model United Nations (UCUMUN) organised an international conference on “A brace New World- it’s time for Africa” on 6-9 February at Utrecht University College. Delegates and chairs



will be able to participate in the Security Council, International Criminal Court, Human Rights Council, Arab League and the Economic and Social Council. Model United Nations (MUN) is a simulation of the United Nations where the official rules of the organization and some of its official Committees are being simulated. Participants were assigned a different country which they represent for the duration of the conference. Among others the conference was addressed by former Dutch Development Cooperation Minister, Jan Pronk, and Professor Gerd Junne. 120 delegates from

around the world signed up for the UCUMUN conference (*Picture shows: Member of the organising committee UCUMUN, Saptarshi Chowdhury Barua, who is also a member of BASUG handing over the bouquet to Minister Pronk after his speech at the conference; Below: the Organization Team of UCUMUN 2014. From left to right: Emily ter Steeg (Secretary General), George King (Conference Manager), Saptarshi Chowdhury Barua (Officer of External Logistics), Natalie Shatashvili (Officer of Internal Logistics), Benjamin Asante (Sponsor and Promotions Officer), Aleksandra Wojcik (Officer of Internal Logistics), Hidde Bosch (Administrative and Support Officer)Below).*



Raju in charge of BASUG website

M M Haque Raju, Country coordinator of BASUG in Italy has taken over the charge of maintaining the website of the organisation since December 2013. A Social Science Graduate (BSS) from the National University of Bangladesh, Raju is actively associated with a number of Bangladeshi TV channels in Italy (NTV UK, Channel I Bangladesh, Desh TV, U.K.). He is the Vice President of Bangla Press Club, Italy and Italy Representative of SA TV Bangladesh. He is the Co- producer of popular Bengali Talk show titled, ‘Italy Thekey Bolci’ for channel 9 UK.



PICTORIAL



Speakers at the European Parliament conference on ‘The West and the Challenge of Democracy in Bangladesh—a Canadian Perspective’ on 25 Nov 2013. From right: key speaker, former Canadian Minister of State-Asia Pacific, David Kilgour, Spouse of Bangladesh ambassador in Belgium, Bangladesh Ambassador Ms. Ismat Jahan, BASUG Chairman Bikash Chowdhury Barua and organiser, Paulo Casaca, former MEP.



Left: The Netherlands ambassador in Bangladesh, Mr. Gerben de Jong speaking at the BOOM meeting at his residence in Dhaka on 30 October 2013. Photo right: During the BOOM meeting- from left: Ella de Voogd, First Secretary, Leonard Zijlstra of ICCO, Dhaka, Mushfiqna Sitair, Advisor and BASUG Chair Bikash Chowdhury Barua

খেলার জন্য মাঠ চাই
 নব নির্বাচিত সড়ক সন্যাস্ত্র অথু হোসেন বালগার বক্তব্যে আদরা হতাশ!

পত ৫ই জাম্মারী দশম জাতীয় সড়ক নির্বাচনে ঢাকা ও আসনের নির্বাচিত সড়ক সন্যাস্ত্র অথু হোসেন বালগার ১৫ই জাম্মারী বাংলাদেশি জাম্মারী কে দেওয়া এক সাক্ষাৎ কাবে বক্তব্যে তার নির্বাচিত এলাকায় তিনি সাক্ষাৎ ঘট, রেগেপন, কনিষ্ঠনিটি সৈন্যের করা সধে সাক্ষাৎকারে উদ্ভূত করেন।

আমরা অত্যন্ত দুঃখের সাথে বলতে চাই যে, আমাদের জুরাইন-মুদ্রাদপুত্র এলাকার যুব সন্যাস্ত্রের দীর্ঘ দিনের দাবি একটি কোয়ার্টে মঠে, কিন্তু তার বক্তব্যে মঠের কথা কি করে জুলে গেলেন।। কোয়ার্টেগার অকায়ে বর্তমানে এই কুমিল্লিত সন্যাস্ত্র যুব সন্যাস্ত্র মাদকাসক্ত হয়ে পড়ছে। ইহাটাইং ছড়িয়ে পড়ছে চারিদিকে। পল্লভানার পাশাপাশি কোয়ার্টেগাই পারে উদ্ভূতনের শিখরে পৌঁছে দিতে। একটি মঠের অকায়ে জুরাইন-মুদ্রাদপুত্রের যুব সন্যাস্ত্র কোয়ার্টেগে বক্তিত। যুব সন্যাস্ত্র মঠের দাবিতে সাক্ষাৎ নামার অকায়ে নির্বাচিত সড়ক সন্যাস্ত্র অথু হোসেন বালগার প্রতি নির্বীত জুরাইন-মুদ্রাদপুত্রের সন্যাস্ত্র সন্যাস্ত্র কনন।

দাব্যাবা

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(BASUG sponsors Jurain Football Academy in Dhaka; Right: TNU & BASUG members meeting at BASUG on RfCD)