

Editorial

Millions of Bangladeshis are eagerly awaiting the parliamentary elections later this month with much anticipation and enthusiasm. A lot of work has been done to improve the electoral process, to make it transparent and credible. I wish all actors involved and the people of Bangladesh a free, fair and peaceful election and a smooth transition to an elected government.

In this regard, I am pleased that 6 poll observers from Switzerland are joining the European Union election observer mission to support the electoral process in Bangladesh. Their participation is part of Switzerland's policy of providing experts in different fields to promote democracy, human rights and peace building in different countries. In addition to that, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC is supporting the work of the Asia Foundation and the Election Working Group for domestic monitoring of the parliamentary and Upazila elections.

I am also pleased to inform that Switzerland has joined Schengen, which is another important step in further strengthening EU-Switzerland relations. This will facilitate travel in Europe for Bangladeshi passport holders.

I wish all a very happy and prosperous 2009!

*The Ambassador of Switzerland
Dora Rapold*

Switzerland Issuing Schengen Visas

Starting 12th December 2008, the Swiss-EU Schengen cooperation became operational. This means that Switzerland has started issuing Schengen visas valid for maximal three-month stays. The Swiss-Schengen visa will not only allow travel in Switzerland but also in the whole Schengen area. Conversely, Bangladeshi passport holders with a valid Schengen visa issued by other Schengen states will also be able to enter Switzerland without an additional Swiss visa. The Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh will adopt Schengen procedures when issuing visas.

US\$ 6 million Swiss Grant for Skills Development Project in Bangladesh

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC will provide US\$ 6 million (in two phases within 2008-2013) for the Skills Development Project of the Government of Bangladesh, which will provide support to strengthen the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system in Bangladesh. The objective of the project is to build up skilled and semi skilled human resources for economic and social development. An agreement for the first phase (2008-2011) for a contribution of US\$ 3.6 was signed between the Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan and the Ambassador of Switzerland Dora Rapold at the ERD Conference Room in Dhaka on 12th November. The project will be implemented in urban and rural areas of 4 divisions - Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna in partnership with industries and non governmental agencies such as specialized skills training providers. The project is financed by the Government of Bangladesh, SDC and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and will be implemented by the Directorate of Technical Education under the Ministry of Education of Bangladesh.



ERD Secretary M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan and Ambassador of Switzerland Dora Rapold exchanging agreement documents for the Skills Development Project



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SDC holds 4-Day Regional DRR and CCA Workshop in Dhaka

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) organized a regional training workshop on mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) in Dhaka during 16-19 November 2008. The objectives of the course were to share SDC's DRR Toolkit, to aware participants on the risks and vulnerability regarding natural hazards and climate change, and to foster better understanding of DRR measures and mainstreaming. SDC staff and partners from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar participated in the course.



Participants at the workshop

The training workshop was followed by a sharing meeting on 20th November with different stakeholders in Bangladesh, including representatives from the Government of Bangladesh, donor community and NGOs. The SDC's DRR Toolkit was shared during the meeting. The meeting concluded with a consensus for further sharing of learnings and strengthening the DRR & CCA network among the stakeholders in Bangladesh.

SDC's Support for Post-Sidr Rehabilitation

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is making a fresh contribution worth of 3 million Swiss Francs for post-SIDR rehabilitation in Bangladesh for the period of December 2008 - June 2010. The programme will be implemented through different development partners i.e. the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and Ashroy Foundation, a national NGO. The major activities of the programme include; construction of multipurpose cyclone shelters, gender sensitive disaster awareness and preparedness, and recovery of agricultural sector in the Sidr affected area.

SDC Supports the Asia Foundation for Domestic Monitoring for Parliamentary and Upazila Polls

The SDC has made a contribution worth 1 million Swiss Francs for the upcoming parliamentary and Upazila elections in Bangladesh for domestic election observation, voter and civic education, electoral reform advocacy to promote improved electoral processes and national level surveys to identify electoral issues.

These activities will be implemented by the Asia Foundation (TAF), an international non-profit NGO, in partnership with the Election Working Group (EWG) - a non-partisan, 33-member national coalition of civil society organizations. Promoting good governance, especially in the domain of local governance is one of the priority areas of SDC's cooperation strategy in Bangladesh.

Joint Donor Study on Citizen's Voice and Accountability Published

A joint donor study titled *Evaluation of Citizens' Voice and Accountability, Case Study: Bangladesh* has been published by the SDC Cooperation Office in Dhaka. The report can be downloaded from the SDC Bangladesh website www.sdc.org.bd.

Swiss Ambassador Inaugurates UCEP School in Sylhet

The Ambassador of Switzerland in Bangladesh Dora Rapold inaugurated a technical school of the Underprivileged Children's Education Program (UCEP) for urban working children named UCEP-Hafiz Mazumdar Sylhet Technical School at Bateshwar in Sylhet on 19th October. The school will initially provide training to 130 students in 4 trades of 12 months' duration. The trades include welding and fabrication, auto mechanics, tailoring and industrial sewing operation. Income and employment generation is one of the priority areas of SDC's development work in Bangladesh. SDC is contributing 1.25 million Swiss Francs to UCEP for 2007-2010 period.

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