

Bangladesh High Commission, Canberra

PRESS RELEASE

18 August 2005

At the initiative of Bangladesh High Commission in Canberra an interface titled 'Taste of Bangladesh' was held on 16 August 2005 at the Federal Parliament Building in Canberra between Australia Bangladesh Parliamentary Group and Bangladesh High Commission in Australia. Twenty seven Parliamentarians of both Houses of the Australian Parliament and a delegation of Bangladesh High Commission headed by H.E. Mr. Ashraf-ud-Doula, High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Australia that comprised among others, the officials of the High Commission, leading expatriate Bangladeshi academicians living in different parts of Australia, former Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, former Bangladesh High commissioner to Australia and a top executive of an Australian Multinational Cooperation that has major business interest in Bangladesh took part in the interface.

In Australia, Parliamentary Groups are formed under the auspices of the Australian National Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union with an aim to foster and maintain friendship with and understanding of particular countries through links with national legislature and thus to improve bilateral relations. The current Australian Bangladesh Parliamentary Group was constituted after the new Parliament was elected in October 2004 with Mr. Andrew Laming, MP as Chairman. This first ever interface between this High Commission and the Australian Parliamentary Group has undoubtedly added a new dimension to Australia – Bangladesh bilateral relations.

Mr. Laming opened the hour and half long meeting by introducing Bangladesh as a country of natural beauty, tremendous potential and a bridge between South and South East Asia. He also highlighted some of the major successes of Bangladesh since the independence.

High Commissioner Mr. Ashraf-ud-Doula in his speech highlighted various socio-economic development of Bangladesh describing Bangladesh as a democratic and progressive Muslim majority country. He especially emphasised on the Bangladesh's achievements in agriculture, poverty reduction, women's education, women empowerment and the unique communal harmony. He elaborated the salient features of Bangladesh foreign policy and on the depth and dimension of Australia – Bangladesh bilateral relations and expressed Bangladesh's desire to further strengthen and expand those ties. He urged the group members to support his endeavour in forging a durable and stronger relationship with Australia.

Former Bangladesh Ambassador Barrister Harun-ur-Rashid explained the strategic importance of Bangladesh. He refuted the current propaganda against Bangladesh seeking to portray Bangladesh as an emerging Islamic fundamentalist

country. He presented Bangladesh as a potential market and investment destination for Australia.

Former Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Mr. Charles Stuart highlighted the importance of Bangladesh as a trade and investment destination. He particularly urged on the need to direct Australia's future assistance to Bangladesh in the area of building and strengthening the institutions in the country.

Mr. Rosss Hitt, Managing Director of Snowy Mountain Engineering Company (SMEC) described his five years happy experience of working in Bangladesh. He contradicted DFAT's travel advisory on Bangladesh as misrepresenting the reality and termed Bangladesh as safe and most investment friendly destination in the region.

Possible intake of skilled professionals to Australia, extending working holiday visa to Bangladeshi youths, mutual cooperation on environment and the possibility of opening of campuses of Australian Universities in Bangladesh were also discussed in the interface. Among others Dr. S.I Khan, Dr. Sharif –As-Saber , Dr. Qamrul Alam, Dr. Mokhlesur Rahman and Mr. Shahadat Manik took part in the discussion.

The Chairman of the Parliamentary Group Mr. Andrew Laming, MP in his concluding remark, thanked the High Commission for its initiative to provide a better and clear picture of Bangladesh to the Australian Parliamentarians. He pledged his group's continued support and cooperation towards building an enduring and constructive relationship between the two countries.

Two documentaries titled 'Bangladesh Marches Ahead' and 'Festivals of Bangladesh' were shown during the programme. The guests were entertained with mouth-watering Bangladeshi cuisines.

Organising such an event with Australian Parliamentarians for the first time, not only succeeded in providing the Australian Parliamentarians a better and realistic image and understanding of Bangladesh, it would also undoubtedly contribute towards strengthening the bilateral relations between Australia and Bangladesh in future.

Following members of Australian Federal Parliament attended the meeting:

1. Mr. Andrew Laming MP, Chairman of the Australia – Bangladesh Parliamentary Group
2. Senator Gary Humphries
3. Senator Ross Lightfoot
4. Senator Stephen Parry
5. The Hon Bruce Baird MP

6. Mr. Phillip Barresi MP
7. The Hon. Warren Entsch MP
8. Mr. Petro Georgiou MP
9. Ms. Kelly Hoare MP
10. Dr. Dennis Jensen MP
11. Mrs. Louise Markus MP
12. Mr. Fergus McArthur MP
13. The Hon Gary Nairn MP
14. Ms. Julie Owens MP
15. Ms. Sophie Panopoulos MP
16. Mr. Don Randall MP
17. Mr. Kym Richardson MP
18. Mr. Patrick Secker MP
19. The Hon Peter Slipper MP
20. The Hon Alexander Somlyay MP
21. The Hon Dr. Sharman Stone MP
22. Mr. Kenneth Ticehurst MP
23. Mr. David Tollner MP
24. The Hon Charles Tuckey MP
25. The Hon Danna Vale MP
26. Mr. Ross Vasta MP
27. Mr. Barry Wakelin MP