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ATTENTION: NEWS EDITOR / CHIEF REPORTER

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UNDP Regional Director Ajay Chhibber Visits Bangladesh

Dhaka: Assistant Secretary General and Assistant Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, Ajay Chhibber paid an official visit to Bangladesh from 14 to 18 February 2009. During his visit he met with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Finance Minister Mr. AMA Muhith, Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni, Minister of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Barrister Shafique Ahmed, Minister of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Mr. Syed Ashraf Islam, Speaker of the Parliament Mr. Abdul Hamid, and Chief Election Commissioner Dr. ATM Shamsul Huda. He also met with representatives of civil society and the diplomatic community. Mr. Chhibber was accompanied during these meetings by UN Resident Coordinator Ms. Renata Dessallien and UNDP Country Director Mr. Stefan Priesner, and senior UNDP staff.

Mr. Chhibber congratulated Bangladesh for the successful elections and the new government on its resounding mandate. He pointed out that the process had been deemed free and fair by both international and domestic observers and that the compilation of a new voter list was an achievement of international proportion.

“With the successful completion of Bangladesh’s elections, all countries in South Asia are now under elected governments for the first time,” Mr. Chhibber said. “This is a historical moment. Bangladesh now faces a golden opportunity to deepen its democratic practices and to make the institutions of governance more responsive to the needs and wishes of the people.”

He underlined the importance of the parliament, saying that it must set the tone from which the other institutions of governance take their inspiration and direction. It is important to establish a constructive political discourse. He also discussed the importance of other key aspects of governance, such as the anti-corruption drive, professional and independent judiciary, and effective local government.

In meetings with senior government leaders and in a forum with prominent economists Mr. Chhibber discussed the impact of the global economic crisis. The effect of the crisis on Bangladesh’s poor and possible policy responses were among the topics discussed. While the impact on Bangladesh had been limited so far, it could be more strongly felt in the future. “Hope for the best but be prepared. The international news gets worse everyday.” Mr. Chhibber said.



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“The UN will continue to remind the developed countries not to let the global economic crisis diminish their responsibilities toward the developing world. We cannot let the crisis overshadow longer-term priorities such as climate change,” he said.

During his visit, Mr. Chhibber went on a field visit to Sathkira and Barguna Districts in southern Bangladesh. Accompanied by Mr. KH Masud Siddiqui, Director General of the Disaster Management Bureau of the Government, he saw areas that were severely affected by cyclone Sidr in 2007. He observed recovery work and learnt about Bangladesh’s disaster response capabilities. Mr. Chhibber also visited programmes that focus on community level disaster risk reduction (CDMP) and employment generation for ultra poor women (REOPA).

Reflecting on his visit, Mr. Chhibber said, “I am impressed by the resilience and fortitude of the Bangladeshi people. Bangladesh has developed strong disaster management systems, which have saved many lives. Other countries could learn from Bangladesh’s ability to both prepare for and respond to natural disasters.”

He pointed out that climate change will be a growing challenge in coming years. Underlining Bangladesh’s constructive role in many UN fora, Mr. Chhibber said, “I encourage Bangladesh to remain active in the international debates on climate change. Bangladesh can take a leadership role among the most affected nations.”

In meetings with the government, Mr. Chhibber expressed his appreciation for the excellent cooperation between the UN system and the Bangladesh government. He underscored that the UN system has been a partner since Independence and would remain so for the long haul. He said, “UNDP is committed to continuing its support to the people and Government of Bangladesh to address the challenges of today and tomorrow.”

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