

Opening Address
by
HE Mr. A. J. A. J. M. G. Hennekens,
Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to
Bangladesh
on the occasion of
the opening of the 11th Dhaka International Film Festival
at the National Museum, Dhaka,
on Thursday 14 January 2010 at 16.00 hrs.

On behalf of the Netherlands Ambassador Mr. Alphons Hennekens, I will read out his speech.

HONOURABLE PRIME MINISTER, HONOURABLE MINISTERS AND EXCELLENCIES, MR AHMED MUZTABA ZAMAL, FESTIVAL DIRECTOR, DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE RAINBOW FILM AND OTHER GUESTS

Good afternoon! Salamaleikum!

Thank you all for coming and thank you for providing me with the opportunity to be part of this official opening of the 11th Dhaka International Film Festival organised by the Rainbow Film Society with the attractive title ‘Better Film, Better Audience, Better Society’.

The Netherlands is contributing once more to the Dhaka International Film Festival, this time as a co-sponsor. This film festival is a unique happening as it is attracting around 200 movies from more than 66 different countries. It is also unique because it is a recurring event taking place every two years and this is already the 11th occasion of the film festival organised by the Rainbow Film Society.

It's good to keep in mind that Dhaka has already a film industry since 1956. The industry is now producing more than a hundred movies a year. Although the majority of the films produced are commercially driven, there are also a handful of Bangladeshi directors, like Tareq Masud and Morshedul Islam who have attained critical acclaim for their outstanding work. Tareq Masud's *Matir Moina*, The Clay Bird, was nominated for the Hollywood Academy Awards in 2003 for the 'Best Foreign Language Film'. Both Masud and Morshedul Islam won a number of international awards for best film or best director.

It is also good to note that the Dhaka film festival creates space for aspiring filmmakers from Bangladesh and the South East Asian region. This gives them the opportunity to connect with global artistic trends and to strengthen Bangladeshi cinema.

The question I would like to draw your attention to now is: why is the Netherlands financing cultural events like this international film festival, why is it worth supporting? An important reason for this is because culture is dynamic and it transcends borders. It broadens the horizon of people when they meet with different norms, values and customs. When cultures live in isolation, people often do not understand each other. When people with different cultural backgrounds meet, like during this International Film Festival, there is a good opportunity of creating mutual understanding and appreciation.

In the coming days, different movies from the Netherlands will be screened like Hannahannah, Zoo Rangers in South

America and Stormbound. These movies can be found in the section ‘Cinema of the world’.

The movie Hannahannah is a romantic comedy where one of the daughters of a large Dutch family introduces her new boyfriend. He gets deeply involved into the preparations of her parents’ wedding anniversary, something she was not looking forward to.

The second movie I mentioned, Zoo Rangers, is very adventurous. It is about a group of youngsters looking for a very rare type of butterfly in South America.

The third one in this category is Stormbound. The movie is about three boys who embark on their first voyage across the ocean and find themselves shipwrecked on a tropical island where they have to face numerous challenges.

In the section ‘short and independent movies’ there are films of director Mr. Rob Hof who was the stimulating force behind a travel series from East to West: from Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, India and various other countries up to Turkey. Each country is dealt with in one particular movie.

And in the spiritual section the film ‘Kindness – A letter from Tibet’ produced by Mrs. Clementine Ederveen, will be shown. She will arrive tomorrow in Dhaka.

Like Bangladesh, The Netherlands also organizes film festivals in different parts of the country. Let me tell you a bit more about these film festivals in The Netherlands. We have the International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam, the Holland Animation Film Festival in Utrecht, and the International Film Festival of Rotterdam. Like the Dhaka International Film Festival, the Rotterdam Film Festival is dependent on volunteers. It is organised every year since 1972

with a central role for independent and artistic movies, but also more mainstream movies are shown. People say that when the film festival hits the city, Rotterdam is at its best. I trust the same holds true for Dhaka during the coming days!

I would also like to take the opportunity to elaborate on the Dutch relationship with Bangladesh. There exists a longstanding and fruitful bond between our countries. Bangladesh and the Netherlands have a lot in common: a delta-landscape, the need for water management and a densely populated country. The main asset of both countries is its population.

Soon after independence The Netherlands recognized Bangladesh and provided support for Bangladesh's development from 1973 onwards. Since that time The Netherlands has been active and the two countries are close partners, working together on a variety of projects and programs.

Bangladesh is actually one of the priority countries of Dutch development cooperation. The Netherlands actively contributes to poverty alleviation by promoting sustainable socio-economic development. This is the core of the Netherlands presence in Bangladesh with an accompanying annual budget of some 65 million Euros equivalent to 650 Crore Taka. The Netherlands Embassy in Dhaka supports programs in the water management sector, basic health care and basic education. When a project or programme is taken into consideration for funding, an assessment is made of the impact on the cross-cutting issues of governance and gender. This means, for example, that women also need to benefit from such a programme; otherwise it will not be approved. The same holds true for governance. Apart from this, the

economic section of The Netherlands Embassy promotes Dutch investments and trade between Bangladesh and the Netherlands.

Reducing poverty is thus the primary goal of development cooperation. In a world where political, cultural and religious differences are increasingly polarising, art and culture - like sports - can bring people together, giving rise to inter-cultural ties and dialogue. The arts, in this case in the form of films, can be a way of addressing certain issues, like human rights, HIV/AIDS, the position of women or violence against women. That is the power of culture!

In conclusion, I am really happy to see so many people around this afternoon. I hope you all enjoy the nearly 200 movies produced in different corners of the world.

May this festival give us the opportunity to learn about the people behind the films and contribute to a better understanding of the different cultures around the globe.

Thank you!

Anja Roelofs
First Secretary