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**The BIG-B Initiative
Aims to Accelerate
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Transformation:
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**Jeremy Bruer for
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Collaborative
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**Italy- Bangladesh
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How to Fix the Economy?

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Embracing Digital Frontiers: The Future of Diplomacy and Service in Bangladesh

COLORS Business explores the Ministry's remarkable achievements, including the digitization of consular services, the establishment of an Innovation Lab, and initiatives like the Bangladesh Trade Portal. **Dr. Syed Muntasir Mamun**, Director General of the International Trade, Investment & Technology Wing, highlights the Ministry's commitment to efficiency, inclusivity, and global leadership in digital diplomacy, shaping a technologically empowered future for Bangladesh.

The Hon. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina embarked on an audacious journey towards Digital Bangladesh in 2008. The Hon. ICT Adviser Sajeeb Wazed Joy helped articulate the vision in vivid details. As of 2023-2024, the dream of a Digital Bangladesh has turned into reality and a new journey towards a SMART Bangladesh has commenced.

Under the visionary leadership of Dr. Hasan Mahmud, the Hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry is not just navigating but shaping the future of diplomacy and international service. This transformation is deeply rooted in the commitment to efficiency, inclusivity, and innovation, as illustrated through a range of initiatives from digitalizing consular services to leveraging artificial intelligence for global diplomacy. In his maiden speech to the diplomatic corps in Dhaka in 2009, as the then State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Hasan Mahmud, MP, identified the transfer of critical technologies as one of his core Foreign Policy priorities. The Foreign Office does not want to

see citizens standing in queue for services which they can receive at the convenience of their homes. Over the least two years, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with the A2i MyGov team, has successfully digitized 34 consular services and 28 internal services. This accomplishment followed multiple rounds of design, validation, and integration workshops. The Ministry has meticulously completed functional verification through cross-checking. Currently, 62 services of the Ministry are available on the government's platform, providing digital accessibility to service seekers based on their applications.

In an era where technology transcends geographical boundaries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh stands at the forefront of an unprecedented digital revolution. In the digital era, Bangladesh stands out for its strategic embrace of technology in diplomacy and public service. Bangladesh is not just participating in the global dialogue on digital diplomacy but is actively shaping its

future, demonstrating the profound impact of visionary leadership at the intersection of technology and diplomacy.

Dr. Syed Muntasir Mamun, the Director General of the International Trade, Investment & Technology Wing at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has been instrumental in these efforts. He has detailed how the Ministry is fervently pursuing various innovative and technology-driven solutions. Highlighting the complexity of international diplomacy and global issues, Dr. Mamun elaborated on the Ministry's initiatives to digitize its services and solutions. This move towards digital transformation is in line with the Ministry's 'Smart Bangladesh 2041' strategy, which aims for a technologically progressive and digitally empowered country.

Pioneering Digital Transformation:

Dr. Mamun eloquently shares the journey of the Ministry of Foreign



Dr. Huzefa
Director General,
International Trade,
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Department, Ministry of Foreign
Affairs
He shares insights into
government initiatives,
examining the strides
towards SMART
Pakistan.

Affairs towards digitizing 34 consular and 28 internal services, a monumental task accomplished in collaboration with the A2i MyGov team. *This effort reflects the broader vision of Smart Bangladesh, aiming to bring services to the citizens' doorsteps, eliminating the need for physical queues, and enhancing accessibility.* "Our ultimate goal," Dr. Mamun states, "is to ensure that every Bangladeshi, irrespective of their location, has access to our services with a single click." This digital leap is expected to save \$1.2 billion annually, showcasing a blend of economic foresight and technological innovation. The global digital transformation market, expected to reach over \$1 trillion by 2025, underscores the significance of Bangladesh's initiatives in keeping pace with global trends.

Fostering Innovation Through the iLab:

The establishment of an Innovation Lab (iLab) marks a significant stride towards integrating data-driven decision-making across the Ministry's functions. By building a neural network and fostering a data warehouse, the iLab is set to revolutionize diplomatic efforts and policy formulation. Dr. Mamun emphasizes, "The iLab is not just a hub for innovation; it is a catalyst for smart diplomacy, ensuring that our decisions are informed, impactful, and aligned with the global technological landscape." The integration of AI in government, projected to reach \$29.79 billion by 2026, highlights the global movement towards data-driven governance, positioning Bangladesh as a leader in this domain.

Empowering Trade through the Bangladesh Trade Portal:

The Bangladesh Trade Portal (BTP)

Our journey towards a smart MoFA is not just about adopting new technologies; it's about fostering a culture of innovation that can navigate the complexities of the modern world

emerges as a beacon of economic diplomacy, designed to facilitate trade, promote domestic products, and foster international partnerships. Dr. Mamun highlights the portal's dual benefits: streamlining trade processes for Bangladeshi businesses and offering international partners a transparent and efficient trading environment. "The BTP is a testament to our commitment to enhancing economic diplomacy and showcasing Bangladesh's vibrant economy on the global stage," Dr. Mamun notes. With Bangladesh's exports standing at approximately \$52 billion in the fiscal year 2021-2022, the BTP plays a critical role in achieving the nation's goal to increase its export volume to \$80 billion by 2024.

Bridging the Digital Divide with the e-Quality Center:

The e-Quality Center for Inclusive Innovation represents Bangladesh's commitment to eliminating the global digital divide through South-South cooperation. This initiative

underscores the importance of technology transfer, policy research, and financial support in achieving digital inclusion. "By sharing knowledge and resources, we aim to empower developing nations, ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital era," Dr. Mamun asserts. The center's strategy to expand research facilities to 50 countries by 2026 emphasizes Bangladesh's dedication to fostering global digital inclusion, addressing the fact that approximately 37% of the world's population has never used the internet.

Revolutionizing Diplomacy with AI and Technology:

The Ministry's dedication to integrating technology into diplomacy is vividly captured through the Innovation Lab and AI Challenge Fund. These initiatives aim to enhance the ICT capabilities of the Ministry, promoting efficiency and informed decision-making. "The fusion of technology and diplomacy is not just about enhancing our operational efficiency; it's about redefining the future of international relations," Dr. Mamun reflects. The predictive modeling capabilities of AI-based tools, essential for proactive crisis management, illustrate the Ministry's innovative approach to navigating global challenges.

Leading Economic Diplomacy:

Dr. Mamun underscores the pivotal role of technology and innovation in driving economic diplomacy. From expanding trade to securing remittances and fostering public-private partnerships, the Ministry is leveraging technology to promote national interests and global cooperation. "Economic diplomacy is at the heart of our efforts to secure a prosperous future for Bangladesh, with technology acting as a key



Dr. Mamun elaborates on the establishment of the Innovation Lab (iLab), a catalyst for smart diplomacy and data-driven decision-making, setting Bangladesh apart in the realm of digital diplomacy.

enabler," he remarks. The strategic use of economic diplomacy, facilitated by digital platforms like the BTP, is crucial for enhancing Bangladesh's global trade relations and economic resilience.

Addressing Global Challenges with Innovation:

In response to contemporary global crises, the Ministry's innovative use of technology and data analysis has been instrumental. The Innovation Lab's AI-based tools and predictive modeling capabilities have enabled proactive and efficient crisis

management. "Our approach combines technology with strategic foresight, allowing us to navigate and respond to global challenges with precision," Dr. Mamun explains. This forward-thinking strategy is essential for addressing issues like the COVID-19 pandemic, showcasing the potential of digital tools in crisis situations.

Promoting the RMG Sector Internationally:

The Ministry plays a crucial role in supporting the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry, utilizing economic diplomacy to enhance its international

presence. Dr. Mamun highlights the strategic efforts to diversify trade partnerships and advocate for the RMG sector's interests on the global stage. "Our diplomatic endeavors are aimed at ensuring the sustainable growth and global competitiveness of Bangladesh's RMG sector," he states. The RMG industry, as the backbone of Bangladesh's economy, benefits significantly from the Ministry's efforts to secure favorable trade agreements and international cooperation.

Envisioning a Technologically Empowered Future:

Looking ahead, Dr. Mamun envisions a ministry that is fully integrated with innovation and technology. The focus on digitalization, the Innovation Corner, and strategic partnerships underscores a commitment to adapting to the evolving demands of international diplomacy. "Our journey towards a smart MoFA is not just about adopting new technologies; it's about fostering a culture of innovation that can navigate the complexities of the modern world," Dr. Mamun concludes. This vision aligns with global trends towards digital governance and smart diplomacy, positioning Bangladesh as a leader in leveraging technology for international relations and service provision.

In summary, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh is setting a new standard for digital diplomacy. Through its comprehensive approach to leveraging technology, the Ministry is not only enhancing its service delivery and operational efficiency but also playing a pivotal role in addressing global challenges and promoting economic growth. As Bangladesh continues to navigate the complexities of the international arena, its commitment to innovation and digital transformation remains a guiding light, promising a future where technology and diplomacy converge to create a more connected and empowered global community. 🌐