



**Date : September 28, 2011**

**From: Syed Saad Andaleeb  
(outgoing) President, BDI**

**To: The Executive Committee, BDI**

**Subject: My Eight Years with BDI**

For the past eight years I have had the privilege, as president, of leading a group of remarkable human beings representing BDI's executive committee. I will cherish this experience long into the future. Through our interactions and exchanges, I learnt a great deal from all of you. Together we have also created great value from our collective will and labor of love. Often I have been humbled by the insights and different viewpoints that you brought to BDI that added strength to our organization and endeavors. What pleased me most was how quickly we were able to come together to address BDI's challenges. How I wish our national leaders would reflect upon the strength that lies in diversity of expertise and perspective.

Sincere thanks are also due to Penn State Erie. Its administration always encouraged my efforts to emancipate 150 million people, representing the seventh largest nation in the world. Penn State's role in enabling us to gain national stature has been quite substantial. I am grateful to the administration for its support and encouragement.

I would like to enumerate, first, what has been accomplished to date under my leadership. Then I would like to suggest what I envision as BDI's growth path in the years to come. This vision is by necessity partial, given the size of our organization. With serious effort, however, I believe we can continue to grow and accomplish a great deal more.

We have undertaken several important initiatives that have provided rich dividends. These include:

### **A Strong Executive Committee**

When I took over as president in 2004, BDI really had three active members. It was my mission then to bring in a few accomplished individuals who would provide strength and direction to BDI. Thereafter we grew to fourteen distinguished members, two of whom left us recently because of their time and related commitments. The industrious EC, a deeply committed one, was the main reason why we accomplished so much with so few resources. The EC is the bulwark upon which BDI has grown and will continue to grow.

## **The Journal of Bangladesh Studies (JBS)**

JBS is BDI's flagship, its pride, and its defining endeavor. Through thick and thin we continue to publish twice a year. Beginning in 1999, we are now in its 13th year of publication. Here are some accomplishments of and developments at JBS.

- JBS began its journey in Bangladesh in 2004 with East West University that committed to publishing the Bangladesh version and distributing it in the country. That venture flagged after two years, mainly because an anchor was not developed on EWU's side. Also, with changes in administration, EWU's support dwindled and JBS's availability to the academic community in Bangladesh was suspended.
- In 2007, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute agreed to represent JBS in Bangladesh, partnering with Scholastica. Because we were averse to its funding by corporate entities, BEI was unable to sustain the journal for more than a year.
- In 2010, we renewed our presence in Bangladesh through Policy Research Institute (PRI). We agreed that for a couple of years, we would allow one corporate sponsor to provide the cost of publication. Today, JBS goes to roughly 500 recipients in Bangladesh working in academia, think tanks, research bodies, development agencies, embassies, government bodies, and policy circles. I hope this partnership with PRI will continue to nurture a regular subscriber base to sustain JBS in Bangladesh.
- Today JBS is registered with the National Serials Data Program, Library of Congress (ISSN No. 1529-0905) USA. It has also made inroads into Berkeley, Cambridge, Columbia, Cornell, Illinois, Minnesota, NYU, Princeton, Rice, Wisconsin, and other institutions of distinction. Through its presence in the South Asian libraries, JBS is expected to influence policy in Bangladesh (its intended goal) much more vigorously.
- In the U.S. JBS was sponsored by the American Institute of Bangladesh Studies (AIBS). Since 2003 we have received roughly \$10,000 from the organization as a show of their confidence in us. This grant sustains a large part of our enterprise. I am indebted to Dr. Syedur Rahman, ex-President of AIBS, who saw the potential of JBS and came to its assistance.
- JBS has built up a peer-review board consisting of over 80 experts with Ph.D. backgrounds. Their contributions in filtering and guiding the papers are immense.
- There is much more to be done with the journal; with BDI's new leadership we expect to break new ground on sources and quality of articles, special issues, redesigning JBS, and listing it with some of the major indexes.

## **Book Publication Program**

BDI's book publication program has been another source of pride. We have published eight books to date—three recently from the Harvard conferences—since I became president, averaging one book per year. We can also take pride in the fact that UPL, the most sought after publisher in Bangladesh, takes our work very seriously and has not rejected a single publication project to date. You may well know that UPL books are available in the international market. At least one other book is in the pipeline and I expect that this endeavor of ours will continue full-steam into the future.

## **Conferences**

BDI organized two high-profile conferences at Harvard University in 2008 and 2009. Attended by academics, policy makers, politicians, researchers, students, and even the U.S. State Department, both conferences gained national recognition in Bangladesh. There was intense coverage for several months by The Daily Star and Prothom Alo about conference themes. Several of us were asked to share our experiences and insights in the national media, as well as with various organizations (Bankers Association, Universities, BEI, and even the National Defense College). A third major conference is being contemplated for December 2012, to be held in Bangladesh, while a mini-conference is being planned for December 2011 to emphasize the role of manufacturing in the national economy.

## **Policy Papers**

We began to toy with the idea of writing a substantial annual policy paper. This resulted in one such paper when the recent government came to power. With a growth in membership, the new EC may consider revitalizing this enterprise. Selected articles from JBS can also serve to revamp this activity to insert BDI into Bangladesh's policy discussions.

## **Web Presence**

BDI now has a web presence that began several years ago. There is a great deal of useful information at the web site ([www.bdiusa.org](http://www.bdiusa.org)), including our mission/vision and the constitution, back issues of JBS, books published, conference information, etc. But it is still a work-in-progress. The web site can be our mouthpiece, spreading innovative ideas for the development of Bangladesh. With the help of a sub-committee and new members, I hope our web presence will develop into a powerful voice to influence policy in Bangladesh.

## **BDI's Social Consciousness**

BDI's executive committee members have a softer, egalitarian bent that became evident since our first attempt to raise funds for the underprivileged and the suffering. An amount of \$1506 was raised for flood victims that was sent to BRAC for disbursement. This was followed by fund raising for the SIDR victims: we raised \$3,710. In recent times we have raised money for the Japanese tsunami, the Joplin tornado, and recently for Somalia. Floods in Pakistan and India may also receive due consideration by the new executive committee.

We also participated in a secular campaign to decry the Mumbai attack, as well as the Gujarat carnage. BDI considers these acts as being socially responsive rather than being politically oriented.

## **NIA Fund**

BDI established a NIA (National Innovators Award) fund to reward enterprising locals in Bangladesh who are able to come up with innovations that have substantial social and economic impact. Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology was the local partner. When the

funds were at about Tk 18 lakhs, I was able to release it from BUET which had not acted on the NIA theme. Today that fund stands at appx. Tk 22 lakhs, and has not been put to any substantive use. Recent discussions to use the funds to support MA/Ph.D. theses in Bangladesh that are aligned with BDI's vision may be pursued by the new EC.

## **Linkages**

I have helped develop strong linkages with the following organizations that can be leveraged for BDI's various initiatives:

- Harvard's Ash Institute
- Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS)
- Center for Policy Dialogue
- Bangladesh Enterprise Institute
- Policy Research Institute
- U.S. Embassy in Bangladesh
- Bangladesh Embassy in USA
- Universities – NSU, IUB, BRAC, BRAC's Institute of Educational Development, ULAB, University of Dhaka (IBA)
- Board of Investments and several ministries of the GOB
- BEN
- AEDSB
- AIBS
- USBAC (in DC)
- The Daily Star
- Prothom Alo

## **Ideas Floated During the Past Eight Years**

Various ideas were shared with the EC over the past eight years. For lack of organizational strength or interest, these were shelved and may be revived at an appropriate time.

- BDI chapters nationwide, youth chapter, and a chapter in Bangladesh
- Freedom Fighter Fund (for scholarship/settlement)
- Science & Math Education Project using NIA Funds
- JBS Special Issue with Retired Bureaucrats, DDBF (now defunct), and BEN
- Data project to build an experts list of NRBs
- Reviewing Masters Theses from Bangladesh
- Funding chairs in various universities, jointly with them, with clear performance criteria
- NRB platform for intellectual exchange with BD

## **This Past Year**

We have achieved several milestones in the past year that will set BDI's course for the future. These include:

- *Establishing the vision/mission/goals/and performance criteria for BDI's achievements.* The new EC ought to keep an eye on these carefully and collectively developed themes to pursue BDI's agenda. The document may be modified over time with anticipated changes in the environment.
- *Restructuring BDI.* A lean BDI executive committee has been formed which means that decisions can be made more quickly and followed up as quorum is more easily attained.
- *Membership drive.* With an eye to sustaining the organization, it is imperative that newer and younger members be brought into BDI and groomed, using the various standing committees.
- *Regular meetings.* To pursue ideas to their fruition, it is imperative that BDI's meetings be regular and sustained. The first Saturday of every month has been established for this purpose, with EC members asked to confirm attendance three days before the meeting to insure that quorum will be met.

### **Some Concluding Thoughts**

JBS will develop an editorial advisory committee to guide the journal better in the coming days. Funding is not of immediate concern; but everyone is asked to pitch in and bring in several subscribers per year. This will need some effort, i.e., calling up, reminding, or even visiting potential subscribers if needed. Perhaps selecting people in our network to champion JBS from each major city of USA and even Europe will be useful to take up the cause of JBS.

The book project ought to deliver one or more volumes every two years (for now). Depending on your area of expertise, I encourage each of you to take a lead role and start thinking of being the lead editor of a book project. Deadlines are a good way to keep people focused.

The idea of holding a conference every two years either in the USA or in Bangladesh (in collaboration with the universities there) has been elaborately discussed. We could alternate the conference once in the US and once in Bangladesh. This is a lifeline to JBS and our book publication program, as well as to remain engaged in Bangladesh's policy prerogatives and become a thought leader in Bangladesh's policy circles.

We may also contemplate starting a databank of NRB experts to:

- a. Avail the expertise to the universities for short-term capacity development projects (training of trainers).
- b. Provide intellectual assistance to various institutions in the country (research, curriculum design, technical matters, seminars on pedagogical tools, etc.)

Finally, reporting of various matters pertaining to BDI needs to be more regularized, especially its financial status, web site hit rates, membership status of JBS, and project progress (conferences, books, etc.).

I recall sometime in the past (6-7 years ago) I had suggested that BDI needs everyone to pitch in. Collective effort will be the crucial link if BDI is to continue making waves in the future.

Thank you all, once again, for allowing me the privilege of leading you for the past eight years. It has been a wonderfully positive experience and I should write a book on lessons learnt from leading a band of Bengali scholars and professionals! I am confident that I leave BDI in very capable hands and expect to see its substantial footprints in the development of Bangladesh in the years to come.

Peace and good wishes.

Syed Saad Andaleeb  
President, BDI (2004-2011)