

FROM THE EDITOR

It gives me immense pleasure to present the first issue of the Journal of Bangladesh Studies (JBS). JBS is dedicated to fostering greater understanding of the problems of development in Bangladesh from a comprehensive perspective by addressing social, political, economic, legal, ethical, technological, and related issues. This multi-disciplinary approach is important because development must embrace the concept of diversity—the diversity of expertise, methods, analyses, and prescription—to provide better, more meaningful, and practicable answers that have continued to elude strategists, planners, administrators, and researchers involved with the development of Bangladesh. While progress has been made in a few sectors, there is much more that needs attention to claim comprehensive development.

Thus, JBS seeks innovative and path-breaking ideas from contributors in different disciplines. The alternative perspectives are expected to provoke broad-based debate and discussion; they are also expected to challenge policy makers and practitioners to redefine the problems of development and to seek pioneering solutions that make a real difference. Preference will be given to articles that question the status quo and make a break from traditional thinking to introduce fresh insights that will ultimately become the core of mainstream policy dialogue and analysis. For example, it has been said that the development of Bangladesh has often been charted out by external elements such as the development agencies, donor groups, and their selected representatives. Additional research is needed to assess their real contributions and to seek ways in which their role is better integrated with indigenous expertise to spur development that is more responsive to the needs of the masses.

Attention has also been devoted in recent times to the problem of corruption and its insidious effects on social, political, and economic development. But there is very little attempt to understand how certain core values such as self-respect, self-esteem, and dignity are linked to corruption. More precisely, it is important to understand why is it

that these core values have deteriorated so drastically, especially among many in positions of power, such that indulging in corrupt practices is, apparently, not viewed as a despicable and socially undesirable act any more. Anthropologists, social scientists, psychologists, economists, and members of other related disciplines must delve into these issues and provide answers.

The crises of leadership and legitimacy that have continued to plague the country at all levels also deserve greater attention today in a country grid-locked by petty interests and self-seeking turf wars that have relegated the common man to obscurity. Questions such as who attains power, how do they attain it, and whether the country's leadership has been in appropriate hands or in the hands of the lowest common denominator demands analytic and reasoned answers.

The issue of identity has also come to the forefront in many forums in recent times. Whether the people of the land are Bangladeshis or Bangalees, and whether religious or cultural heritage should come first has apparently generated notable disagreement and discontent among sections of the country's thought leaders. What is the role of such debate in the formation of identity? How can we also explain the reign of terror that has been unleashed with regularity upon the masses, and to what extent has it crippled the process of social and economic development? More importantly, how can the elements who are responsible—the mastaans, the power brokers, and their cronies—be taken out of the development equation in lawful ways?

Technology is another area that must be better understood and adapted to the needs of Bangladesh. For example, whether there is a disjoint between available technology and the type of technology that is best suited to the stage of development of the country must be clearly articulated. This has implications for investments in alternative technologies. In the power sector, for example, technologies such as solar panels, wind-power, or micro-hydro systems may be better alternatives compared to conventional grid-based

power systems with their attendant costs. Alignment strategies for dealing with information technology is another key issue that needs to be envisioned. Ways of battling pollution and its devastating effects on health also deserves continuing attention.

The problems of poverty, inflation, investment, unemployment, productivity, resource shortages, and related issues must continue to be addressed in innovative ways. While esoteric equations and models have a role in understanding these issues, they must be translated more lucidly into action components for practitioners.

Public health is another critical issue as is public education. The needs, the challenges, and the strategies that are vital to both sectors must be better articulated because of their bearing on development. What are the key issues in these sectors and what are the priorities? For example, a critical question in both sectors that demands far greater attention is: Why have people lost confidence in the nation's capability to deliver health and education? Also, how much is the country losing in foreign exchange to neighboring countries? What should be done to stem the flow?

The above examples are not meant to set the agenda for JBS; they are merely indicative of the complexities of development and the variety of interconnected issues that are yet to be adequately addressed. That there are many other important issues beyond those listed above is reflected in this volume.

Nurul Islam's article boldly confronts the realities and dynamics of power that, in his view, has been a major impediment to development. The tenuous entente between the military and political forces and the role of each in society has a long, unstable, and untrusting history that has taken its toll on development. Clearly the existing balance and distribution of power must continue to be questioned and the transition to democracy vigorously pursued. This overarching goal has significant implications for development as evidenced by the experiences of other countries that subscribe to democratic values and norms.

Tanweer Akram highlights the inefficiencies of

public enterprise and tackles the question of privatization. The need to make information more widely available to private investors, the alternative methods of privatization, the need for FDI, the importance of financial sector discipline, and related issues are clearly articulated and deserve the attention of policy makers. Further research is needed in this area to determine the right balance between private and public enterprise in the context of Bangladesh.

Munir Quddus and Salim Rashid address a vital sector—the garment industry—that has been the mainstay of the country's source of employment (through both forward and backward linkages) and foreign exchange earnings in recent times. While growth has been solid and the sector has been resilient, the challenges it faces once the multi-fiber agreement is phased out by 2004 should urge policy makers to be proactive and to embark on appropriate strategies *now* to ensure good health and vitality of the sector when circumstances change. The country's heavy reliance on this sector should also engender dialogue on whether and how to attain further diversification.

Akhter Hossain introduces additional insights on the causes of the 1974 famine. His article, relying on Amartya Sen's entitlement approach, is important in that it serves as a reminder that famines can be caused by situations other than a sudden decline in aggregate food availability. The importance of attending to critical issues such as inflation and exchange rates in formulating and managing economic policies is central to his paper.

Faizul Islam's article critically appraises the circumstances that have led to greater market-oriented reforms in Bangladesh. Corruption and mismanagement in the state owned enterprises and a variety of problems in the financial sector represent the core arguments of his paper that urges the need for greater market-oriented reforms.

Finally, Syed Zahir Sadeque highlights a critical issue—ground water shortage—that portends grave consequences in many parts of Bangladesh. In a flood-prone country, the issue of water shortage is certainly intriguing if not astonishing. Yet, the country must confront the reality that a

shortage of this vital resource has important implications for personal health and hygiene, as well as economic activities. Significant issues are brought to the attention of those who must formulate a more comprehensive water-sharing policy that is equitable and pragmatic.

On a somewhat pragmatic issue, I would like to urge readers to subscribe to JBS to encourage the researchers and to support a forum for analysis and debate on Bangladesh. Both individual (US \$15) and institutional (US \$100) subscriptions are encouraged to support the continuation of JBS. Back issues may also be ordered (US \$10 plus S&H), but their availability cannot be guaranteed. All subscriptions should be sent to Syeda Khan, C/O BDI, 812 Hope Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15220.

Finally, I would like to thank the many individuals who have contributed in a variety of ways to help launch the first issue. First, I would like to acknowledge the constant support that I received from the editorial board and the reviewers who responded very positively to the idea of the journal. JBS also owes a debt to its predecessor, *Thoughts and Initiatives*, that was painstakingly championed by Ashraf Ali. His ideas, as a member of the editorial board of JBS, will continue to help shape the journal. I would also like to thank John M. Magenau, III, Director, School of Business at Pennsylvania State University, Erie, for supporting the idea of the journal, especially because it had some budget implications. Sue Pennington took great pains to put together the journal in its present format from a diverse set of submissions using various word processing packages with mysterious codes and challenging graphics. Carolyn Dudas provided many technical solutions when the submitted documents strongly resisted format changes. However, some glitches still remain, reflecting our pioneering effort. These experiences led to our note to contributors to submit their papers principally as Word documents. Until we find a publisher, I hope contributors will cooperate. Martha Campbell from the Media and Instructional Support Center at Penn State Erie willingly designed the cover of JBS. My thanks to each of these individuals for their help.

My goal is to raise JBS, in a reasonable time frame, to a stature where it is widely read and

cited, and sought by libraries, academics, researchers, policy makers, students, and others who study development. To achieve this goal, I need the help of many parties—experts, contributors, critics, readers, subscribers, the editorial board, and others. I shall look forward to partnering with all of you to make JBS a success.

Syed Saad Andaleeb, Ph.D., Editor–JBS,
School of Business, The Pennsylvania State
University, Erie, Station Road, Erie, PA. 16563
(814)-898-6223, e-mail: ssa4@psu.edu.