

## FROM THE EDITOR

In the summer of 1998, a few of us began exchanging emails and phone calls to explore the possibility of launching a multidisciplinary academic journal dedicated solely to Bangladesh and its problems and prospects of development. The discussion generated considerable interest and excitement and before long, the seeds of a new journal—*Journal of Bangladesh Studies*—were sown. Emerging from its predecessor, BDI: *Thoughts and Initiatives*, we anticipated many problems; but our commitment and resolve overrode the concerns. Call for papers went out far and wide...thanks to the Internet. For a new initiative, the response was not overwhelming; but a steady trickle of papers began to come in. With patience, a willingness to work with the authors, and the dedication and support of the editorial board, we eventually launched the first issue of JBS in December 1999.

Six months later, as planned, I am pleased to present the second issue of the journal. We believed once the journal was launched, a community of scholars and practitioners interested in the affairs of the country would respond. We are very encouraged by the fact that there is evidence of a growing interest in the journal as reflected in the number of inquiries about JBS from scholars and libraries, a growing number of international submissions, and the quality of the manuscripts. We are already preparing for the December 2000 issue.

For a new initiative such as this, there are challenges ahead of us. But we are committed to the vision of attaining greater international recognition, establishing a scholarly reputation, and becoming a credible source of ideas and prescriptions for policy makers. As an important step toward this vision, we are now registered with the National Serials Data Program, Library of Congress (ISSN No. 1529-0905). We will soon begin to explore linkages with reputable publishers. Our vision will be better realized when more scholars and practitioners join us in a partnership of inquiry, dialogue, and dissemination of valuable insights and information relevant to Bangladesh. Consequently, we urge and invite scholars and practitioners focusing on matters pertaining to Bangladesh to consider JBS as their preferred medium and to submit their views as manuscripts for debate and discussion. We consider JBS as a vehicle and an opportunity to embark on a journey to help realize many of the dreams, hopes, and aspirations of the people of Bangladesh, and perhaps even other nations in a similar plight. In this

journey of ours, we must continue to ascend in quality, relevance, and rigor if we are to help Bangladesh rise in the community of nations. In this pursuit, we seek quality articles that will provide the intellectual energy for the country to go forward. We are especially interested in views that make a break from traditional thinking and the beaten track because they have not been effective. These views must also be amenable to practice. Thus we encourage theory and analysis that also provide prescriptions that can be implemented. In this context, we urge contributors to particularly bear in mind the implementers and their capabilities.

In this issue we first present two “invited” articles; one by Rehman Sobhan, Center for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka and the other by Zillur R. Khan, Department of Political Science, University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh. Invited articles are not peer reviewed. In selecting the authors, however, JBS makes a reasonable judgment that their insights will be relevant, important, and thought provoking. But we also believe that their thoughts need to be tested. Consequently, we will attempt to get commentaries on the invited articles to which the responses of the authors will also be sought. Uninvited commentaries will also be considered on the basis of merit, substance, and good writing. Four peer-reviewed papers are presented next followed by two book reviews. Comments on these papers are also welcome. JBS will seek authors’ responses when appropriate comments are received.

Among the invited articles, Rehman Sobhan’s descriptive article provides a snapshot of history and insight into the quality of leadership the nation is saddled with. The article portends grave consequences as reflected in the sad saga of prolonged conflict between two parties and their leaders unable to set aside their differences in the greater interest of the nation. At the root of their differences is a strong and vitiating aura of mistrust that compels defensive behavior and destructive conflict as witnessed in the ongoing series of measures and countermeasures (such as hartal or strikes) that has resulted in untold losses to the nation. What is numbing is how an impoverished nation, seeking sustenance and hope for a better future, is seemingly sacrificed for the embittered relationship between two rivals locked in a struggle for dominance. One wonders whether the leaders understand their obligations to the nation via the social contract that John Locke and Jean-Jacques

Rousseau elucidated; a contract that the country's leaders are expected to honor. It is high time now for social scientists not merely to describe the state of this mistrust, but also to delve into its causes and to search for ways in which to break this cycle.

Sustained negotiation is a way out of this nation-weakening state of affairs. But, however well intentioned the objectives were of the G-5, it is not clear whether they addressed the negotiation process comprehensively at three distinct levels: interpersonal, intra-group, and inter-group conflict. Perhaps the shuttle diplomacy between the two leaders should have been preceded by an analysis of intra-group conflict that may have locked the two leaders into a state of mind not to give an inch. The optimal response to this state is for each leader not to risk seeking a new equilibrium, the consequences for which are unknown and unpredictable. It is an arcane game-theoretic condition that must be understood better. Another relevant force is that of inter-group conflict; i.e., the conflict between the AL and BNP. Whether the leaders shape conflict at this level or whether the conflict is self-generating is an open question. The force fields generated by each level and their interactions is something that social scientists need to understand better if solutions to this deadlock are to be found.

Another question is whether the G-5 itself was perceived as credible? This is an empirical question that should at least fuel further academic inquiry if not a dissertation! Sobhan's conclusions also reflect a disquieting tone of resignation suggesting that a developing countervailing force was quickly nipped in the bud, and the upper hand restored to the political parties. What is important is to find how the G-5 could become the G-10, then the G-100, and then the G-1000 and so on. That is when civil society will begin to develop as a truly credible countervailing force to regulate the impudence and effrontery that politicians continue to display today with equanimity and disdain.

Zillur R. Khan's article cuts across many interrelated themes and has a prescriptive bent. It also strikes a chord with the previous article in that it examines the role of political leadership and the growing polarization between the two major parties, generated largely by the mistrust that has festered over the years. How this state of mistrust can be reversed is a question that social scientists have not effectively or comprehensively addressed. Unless a mechanism is devised to address this issue, its effects are going to continue to gnaw away at the heart of decent society.

In fact, the trust gap has become so pervasive in Bangladesh society today, with lack of trust in sources of authority being the most problematic, that social order has begun to crumble. This growing phenomenon suggests an interesting and testable hypothesis that the rate of depletion of trust in society will be accompanied with a commensurate rate of increase in anarchy the system. The uncertainties and insecurities associated with anarchy then compels society to withdraw from social engagement and social purpose, destroying its ability to pursue even those basic things that society needs most to move forward: Witness the breakdown in the educational institutions, in the labor sector, and in law enforcement—all basic to social and economic progress.

Khan's prescription to reeducate the nation's leaders demands further articulation. Whether that capability exists within the nation is a moot point. In fact the nation's educators seem to be losing their credibility. A study was conducted in 1996-97 by Democracywatch, in which the nation's educators were rated and the results published in the nation's dailies. The results do not reflect the measure of confidence that one expects from its educators. Perhaps, there is a need for a national commission to examine the quality and the state of education in the country. And about educating the leaders, it will be difficult to find educators that the leaders will accept

Ahrar Ahmad's review article looks at the context, the concerns, and the hopes in the relationship between India and Bangladesh. Interestingly again, a trust gap between the two nations underlying their relationship seems to serve as a source of constant rancor. If this gap widens, the ramifications are certainly not good. Neighborly behavior should be a two-way street and reflect a spirit of accommodation, openness, and a commitment to resolve matters of discord and frustration in amicable ways. However, one must also note the imbalance and asymmetry in the power relations between the two nations in which India undoubtedly has the upper hand. And generally speaking, because it remains the prerogative of the powerful to exploit the weak, the onus of engendering harmony rests to a degree on the stronger party that must inspire trust and confidence. It must also be recognized that when a powerful party is trusted, its ramifications are quite different for the tenor and quality of the relationship than when the powerful party is not trusted. It is also important for analysts to assess when this trust gap took root, how deep are its incursions, and when did it begin to widen. Religious forces seem to have a historical role

in that the Raj, the former rulers of India, managed to breed and fuel mistrust between Muslims and Hindus over a sustained period of time. That legacy is one that the two nations must work together to destroy. Nations advance in time. Being stuck in a mind set of the past that only generates negative forces must not prevail between sensible parties. As India be should not be perceived as a threat by the people of Bangladesh, Bangladesh should not be perceived as a thorn in India's side. When harmony is restored and passed on to other countries in the region, the prestige and strength of the subcontinent should ascend to levels to be reckoned with. There are good and decent people on both sides and certainly among the intellectual community. They are the ones who should provide the thought leadership that can propel the two nations—and indeed the entire subcontinent—to coexist in harmony. As the more powerful party, however, the onus is perhaps on India to initiate the process; otherwise, Bangladesh and other weaker parties may continue to remain cautious, a condition that is not likely to foster goodwill, mutuality, and cooperation. Bangladesh must also be ready to reciprocate: A gesture not returned is an opportunity lost.

Farida Khan examines the effects of various market-oriented reforms on the economy, especially domestic industrial capability. The analysis suggests that the attainments after a decade-long policy of reforms are not up to expectations. Various explanations are offered. To add to the litany, the ineptness of the bureaucracy and political disturbances are prime scapegoats. However, in most analyses, the entrepreneurs somehow seem to take little blame. With the reforms measures aiding them, one must also examine why the entrepreneurs in various sectors have not been able to respond better. One hypothesis is that the entrepreneurs themselves have been relentless in their pursuit of greed, corrupting themselves and others in the process to serve their needs. As a consequence, innovation has been stifled. For industry and trade to flourish, ways must be found to revive true entrepreneurship and innovation driven by market forces. In the strictest of sense, industrial growth demands a better understanding of markets and their needs and delivering what it takes to satisfy those needs. More simply, what is apparent is that the entrepreneurs generally focus on selling what they can make; instead, they must focus on making what they can sell—not a very subtle difference. In fact this may be the major missing link. Policies of liberalization are helpful, but only as facilitators. If the creative energies of entrepreneurs are lacking, no policy,

however liberal, will be successful in fostering the growth of industry. It is the entrepreneurial mindset and continuous innovation driven by markets forces that must take hold for the situation to improve. In an era when change is the watchword, and where technology, legal institutions, competitive forces and the like have continued to redefine the markets, the entrepreneurs must play a bigger role and jump on the innovation bandwagon. The question is whether the capacity of innovation exists? The rickshaws and scooters have not changed much in the last 50 years, street vendors continue to dominate product distribution, and many products and services remain stuck in time while the world has moved on. The prospects for growth also seem to be dim as other nations continue to build their human resource capabilities rapidly and replace their dated technologies with modern ones. Is Bangladesh ready to compete? The educational institutions have a crucial role to play here in preparing the nation's future risk takers and innovators. Are they prepared to lead the charge and create the human resources for the modern era?

Munir Hassan presents empirical evidence that international migration complements trade. The high correlation coefficients or the coefficients of determination suggest that a significant proportion of trade expansion can be attributed to the migratory patterns from Bangladesh. The analysis is thought provoking. However, future research must evaluate the possibility of spurious correlation and establish a stronger link between the two variables. For example, it is possible that along with migratory patterns, global economic factors caused commensurate growth in exports. Thus the attribution of causality demands caution. It is also important to introduce other variables into the regression exercise to corroborate or refute the findings.

M. Salequzzaman *et al.* present the prospects of converting tidal power to electricity from the coastline of Bangladesh. As a form of pollution free renewable energy with potential, two problems—high capital costs and environmental concerns—stand in the way. The paper discusses how the two problems could be resolved utilizing small-scale technologies, innovative financing, and involving local communities to ensure that all key impacts are manageable. The evidence for “Integrated Tidal Power and Coastal Development” is convincing and needs a closer look by policy makers when seeking project funding.

The two book reviews by Munir Quddus and Syed Abul Basher are full of insights. Both books are suggested reading for those who are interested in various aspects of development. Reviewing the autobiography of Mohammad Yunus, known for his work with the Grameen bank, Quddus reveals certain personal traits of Yunus that are inspiring. Instilling these traits in the youth has long run implications for the nation and its future. Abul Basher speaks to the spirit of entrepreneurship that has taken root in the garment industry. Other industries that have fallen behind have much to learn from the lessons gained by the garment exporters.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that JBS is seeking path-breaking ideas from different disciplines that address the challenges of development in Bangladesh. The 'note to

contributors' in the inside front cover furnishes details for submitting manuscripts. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Sue Pennington and Caroline Dudas for helping with complicated aspects of publishing the articles.

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### ***Call for Papers***

Journal of Bangladesh Studies is inviting academics and experts in various fields to send scholarly papers for publication in its next issue in December 2000. The tentative deadline for receiving papers is September 30, 2000; papers received after the deadline will be scheduled for subsequent issues.

### ***Subscription Information***

Subscriptions are \$15 for individuals in the United States and \$100 for institutions for two issues. For individuals in other countries, subscriptions are \$30 (including first-class postage). Please send subscriptions to Syeda Khan, C/O Bangladesh Development Initiative, 812 Hope Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15220, USA.