

## *FROM THE EDITOR*

This is the third issue of the Journal of Bangladesh Studies and I am delighted to note that interest in the journal has grown substantially as reflected in requests for copies and the increasing number of subscriptions from scholars, academic libraries, international organizations, and a growing number of advanced standing students. Scholarly contributions from authors at various universities, worldwide, have also increased. As we continue to highlight strategic and relevant issues pertinent to Bangladesh on the basis of conceptual and empirical analysis, we are confident that JBS will carve out its own niche and provide intellectual leadership in addressing the challenges of development in Bangladesh and other developing countries.

The focus of JBS, however, is mainly on Bangladesh. We encourage the submission of manuscripts that are innovative, insightful, and incisive. We expect that the articles will provoke debate and challenge policy makers, development planners, international agencies, donor countries, and non-government organizations to review existing practices and seek solutions that bring about “real change” and “real development” that reaches the very grassroots of Bangladesh society.

In this issue, we first present an invited article by Mohammad Yunus, renowned for his pioneering ideas on micro-credit and for providing leadership to an evolving Grameen enterprise that has extended its reach to the underprivileged and become a credible force in its drive to alleviate poverty in Bangladesh. As our policy, invited articles are not reviewed. However, in this case the article was composed by one of the editors from recent speeches that the author provided us in response to our invitation. The composed article has the author’s approval.

Mohammad Yunus calls for information technology (IT) as the new driving force to blaze the way for poverty alleviation in Bangladesh. In particular, he strongly feels that Bangladesh can be a world-class player in the global IT sector very soon. The author’s enthusiasm is appealing, but if hopes were easy to convert to reality, one might also extend Yunus’ hope to sectors other than IT. However, one must be cautious before making a major commitment to an enterprise of such magnitude. The case of Taiwan, which made quick gains in technological prowess, comes to mind: Its recent efforts to turn itself into a “high-tech” island have not materialized because of a

shortage of well-educated and creative people. For Bangladesh, the question is whether the educational infrastructure is strong enough to support Yunus’ contention. In particular, being already behind in a rapidly changing knowledge economy, catching up is in itself a challenge that must be acknowledged. The wherewithal to finance the human, managerial, and technical investments also demands answers. And assuming that these concerns can be resolved, the growing malaise of corruption is certain to waylay any new initiative as witnessed in the past. The energy, telecommunications, and related sectors are cases in point. The reason I bring up these questions is not to dampen initiative, but to introduce, in my view, more realism as regards Yunus’ time frame. If IT is to lead the way, it must also have the blessings of the power structure that simply cannot be removed from the equation; and if they are not supportive IT will remain a dream. NRBs can also play a very vital role. However, they are yet to make any substantial contribution to Bangladesh. Whether they are ready and willing to share their time, knowledge, and financial resources to take up this challenge is a moot question.

Rahim A. Quazi empirically investigates the effects of foreign aid on both GDP growth and domestic savings in Bangladesh. The results suggest that aid is not a critical factor in Bangladesh’s growth strategy. This is a reasonable contention because unless we question where and how aid funds are used, mere injection of funds may do more harm than good to the country. In fact, successive regimes of corruption that have gained personally may explain the effects of aid funds better. It is high time to remove the aura of secrecy surrounding aid flows and open up questions of allocation and use to public debate and discussion. The management of aid must also be in place with goals and objectives clearly established, responsibilities assigned, and accountability ensured. At the same time those in power, along with donors and their conduits, must better explain and direct aid utilization if its beneficial impact on the country is to be reaped.

M. Golam Robbani focuses on the garments industry, which has led the growth in exports from Bangladesh and has sustained much of the economy through forward and backward linkages. But a new era is upon the industry; with GSP being abolished and MFA phased out by 2004, new and strong competitive challenges loom large on the horizon.

The SWOT analysis performed by Robbani serves as an analytical tool to provide key insights and suggestions that must be heeded *now* to ensure that the sector remains viable and vital. Policy makers have little time to prepare for the new realities and must swing into action soon to save this vital sector from annihilation.

M. Fakhru Islam and Yoshihiro Higano bring up a contentious issue involving a powerful neighbor—India. While the issues around Farakka have been featured more prominently in the media, riling up emotions on both sides of the border, the people of the Teesta basin confront a similar fate: the diversion of water by India, especially during the dry season, resulting in significant economic and social consequences for those in the Bangladesh area. As I indicated in the last issue of JBS, a powerful entity (India) can exploit a weaker one (Bangladesh) because of power asymmetries. But the powerful party is less trusted as a consequence; and if this trust gap widens, the resultant conflict can take an ominous shape in cross-border hostilities, both direct and indirect. India also opens up doors for its old enemy to establish ties with Bangladesh (enemy of an enemy syndrome) that should serve neither country well. Certainly civil nations can negotiate and find ways to cooperate. Bangladesh has a potentially large reservoir of energy and it is also a conduit linking the eastern parts of India to West Bengal and beyond. These resources could be brought to the negotiating table as could free market opportunities in both countries to advance the interests of each. And if

other countries have been able to agree on water sharing, why must it be so difficult for India and Bangladesh to resolve? I certainly hope this is not a case of pettiness, a dearth of imagination, or arrogance and pure ill will.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank a wonderful and dedicated team of editors who have been very generous of their time and have provided constant support; the growth of JBS, to a large measure, is the achievement of the entire team. Reviewing the growing number of manuscripts and providing detailed guidelines to authors is a task they have willingly shouldered to help ensure quality. We are also happy to have Faizul Islam on board as a consulting editor who has taken on several responsibilities to help propel JBS forward. Our goal is to continue to raise the stature of JBS with quality articles in every issue and we look forward to the contributions of experts, critics, and subscribers to assist JBS in this declared mission.

Syed Saad Andaleeb, Ph.D.  
Editor, Journal of Bangladesh Studies  
Associate Professor  
School of Business  
Pennsylvania State University, Erie  
Station Road  
Erie PA 16563  
Phone: 814-898-6431  
Email: ssa4@psu.edu

### ***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 June 2001. The tentative deadline for receiving papers is March 30, 2001; 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.