

## *FROM THE EDITOR*

This issue of the Journal of Bangladesh Studies presents five papers that are policy-oriented.

In the first paper, Choudhury M. Shamim discusses Bangladesh-India relations with special focus on the 1972 Bangladesh-India Friendship treaty. The paper examines the delicate balance in the relationship between the two countries, the rationale for both countries to arrive at this treaty at the time it was envisaged, and the evolution of the relationship between the two countries with its many ups and downs including, among other episodes, the problems of water sharing and the recent border skirmishes. Since most treaties are embedded in the circumstances surrounding them, it is important to re-examine them periodically because of other evolving dynamics such as the end of the Cold War, trends in globalization, and the evolution of trading communities such as ASEAN, The EU, or NAFTA. Such re-examination might suggest realignment strategies that could produce greater gains for the country; it even has implications for in-country resource allocation decisions such as whether and how large an army Bangladesh should maintain in view of the treaty and whether the resources presently deployed in their maintenance have better use elsewhere. These and related issues must be publicly debated and policies clearly articulated by the government whose primary purpose is to represent the people, whose lot it must work for to improve. Unfortunately, there is evidence that the successive governments and their administrative functionaries have failed or have not been disposed to deliver the goods to the people. This is reflected in the two following papers.

Munir Quddus addresses the malaise of corruption that is corroding away at the very existence of decent society. While the issue is complex, Quddus argues that there are multiple parties who must share the blame. They include bureaucrats whose extortionist tendencies are widespread and growing, business people whose tendencies, capacity, and imagination to bribe officials in their bid to avoid taxes and customs duties or to speed up processes that deny others their fair share are boundless, politicians whose growing disrespect for the rule of law is appalling, and members of civil society whose failure to condemn the rising tide of corruption is far too timid and uninspiring. Quddus opposes those who propagate the efficiency value of bribery, not only because it is morally wrong, but also because there is no optimal level of bribery. Where then does it end

and what are its consequences? Not only does it affect the workings of the free market system characterized by efficiency and wide distribution of resources, it also inhibits talent from engaging in productive pursuits because of the uncertainty that corruption engenders. Many of these talents apply themselves to improving the lot of people in other countries. Highlighting the various forms of corrupt practices in the garments industry, Quddus espouses the need for transparency, a determined political leadership to break the vicious cycle, and implementation of the rule of law to rid the country of the fast-growing corrupt minority that is choking off sustenance to the common people by siphoning off resources that hardly ever reach the impoverished. And with these unholy resources that the corrupt continue to accumulate, they partake in indulgences that stymie the imagination.

Nazrul Islam uses an analytical framework to argue for administrative reform, showing why there is a lack of sincerity among the civil servants, why the quality of recent recruits in the civil service is decidedly poor, and why there exists an unhealthy gap between official pay and effective pay of the same civil servants. Suggesting that multiple equilibria are possible, Islam classifies these into two categories: "good" and "bad." According to him, the civil servants have become stuck with the "bad" equilibrium. One main reason for this has been the rigidity of the government pay scale compared to private and international pay scales. This bad equilibrium, according to Islam, is harming the country's growth prospects in many different ways. Seeking parity in pay for government services that is commensurate with private and international pay scales, Islam suggests abolishing the various categories of pay in government services and consolidating them into a lump sum cash payment that would be easier to compare with competing pay scales. This is a policy matter that the pay commissions should investigate. But given the deep inroads that corruption has made in the civil service, the intriguing questions are: Given pay parity, how do the "corrupt" civil servants become "uncorrupt"? What is their incentive to unlearn what they have learned? Why would parity in compensation make them work more sincerely? And as HR theories would suggest, improving performance in the civil service may have to integrate other elements such as recruitment policies, training, support environment, evaluation, and reward systems--compensation reform would be only one element in the complex

interaction of variables that might bring about the desired changes. And if compensation is the real issue, why not institute a more transparent system of “service charges” that would take the uncertainty out of negotiating each deal that may vary from one situation to the next and from person to person?

Patricia L. Johnson addresses a vital issue that concerns the country’s labor migration patterns with significant health implications. She warns policy makers about the potentially harmful effects that returning male migrants might impose on both the fertility and health of their wives who, because of cultural constraints, are unprepared to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS. Johnson explores the relationship between male migration, commercialized sex and HIV infection and argues for the use of condoms as both contraceptives and prophylactics. Because condom use in Bangladesh, compared to other methods, is relatively low, Johnson suggests the need for immediate intervention to promote condom use to prevent an AIDS epidemic, as witnessed in many parts of Africa, that could take the lives of millions of Bangladeshis. However, the conditions and circumstances under which condoms are used in households of Bangladesh must be better understood, if their use is to gain greater acceptance.

Salma Chaudhuri Zohir attempts to address the major debates surrounding the gas sector in Bangladesh. The paper is important for policy makers because it addresses the need for an unbiased production sharing contract (PSC), an accurate estimate of gas reserves, and appropriate pricing strategies. As Bangladesh lacks the technical capability to conduct gas exploration on its own, she is forced to sign PSCs, which favor the international oil companies. Bangladesh also needs to increase its per capita primary energy consumption. Hence,

Zohir stresses that the fertilizer and power sectors need to implement their respective projects that are often way behind schedule. The paper suggests that there is a need to supply power and fertilizer to the northwest region on a priority basis. Zohir also suggests that currently Bangladesh is not experiencing a gas shortage. Thus, the pricing of gas needs to be determined on the basis of economic cost and depletion premium. In addition, she argues that since there is not enough gas to meet 50 years of domestic requirements, the question of pipeline export of gas does not arise. She also supports state monopoly in the domestic marketing of gas to avoid distortion in end user prices. Such a suggestion would perhaps reincarnate among many the visions of SOEs such as Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation and its dismal failure at making fertilizer available at undistorted prices to the rural areas.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that JBS welcomes path-breaking articles for its future issues that address the challenges of development in Bangladesh. The ‘note to contributors’ in the inside front cover furnishes details about submitting manuscripts. For enabling this issue, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the editorial board, the anonymous reviewers, and Sue Pennington for her editorial assistance.

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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 2001. The tentative deadline for receiving papers is September 30, 2001; papers received after the deadline will be scheduled for subsequent issues.

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