

FROM THE EDITOR

With this issue we begin the seventh year of publication of the Journal of Bangladesh Studies. From what began in 1999 as a tentative forum for intellectual exchange to influence policy, we feel that JBS has established a wider platform that has begun to attract the work of scholars and practitioners from diverse fields and four continents. The research articles we have received in recent times address women's empowerment and progress, NGOs and rural poverty, class structure and development, water resource management, conflict resolution in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Bihari conundrum, environmental issues, improving farm efficiency, making the Dhaka Stock Exchange function better, and so on. However, other vital issues such as corruption, healthcare, education, population management, crime control, commercial banking, energy policy, technology infusion, religious extremism, identity crisis, foreign policy, etc., are areas in which we maintain interest and look forward to ground-breaking articles.

Being able to attract the work of scholars from a diverse set of fields portends imminent growth of our publication and a possible need to move from a bi-annual to a quarterly journal. We are also on the lookout for a wider base of reviewers (from the present number of 70+) to assist with reviewing. Our double-blind process has been the main strength of the journal and in our quest to maintain high standards for a growing body of international readers, the manuscript acceptance rate has stabilized somewhere around 20-25%. By continuing to ensure quality, we intend to become an important repository of theory and policy related to the development strategy of Bangladesh. We hope that our contributors, readers, and reviewers will form larger networks from which innovative and path-breaking articles will come forth to provide more in-depth and provocative answers to the many seemingly intractable problems facing Bangladesh.

This issue presents four insightful articles. Khorshed Alam stresses the need to incorporate environmental dimensions and analyses in the articulation and formation of development policy. Unless today's narrowly focused policy measures incorporate environmental impacts such as air and water pollution, land degradation, loss of bio-diversity and natural resources, etc., their long term ramifications can be disastrous. Development agencies that influence, help formulate, and fund many of the key projects and are driven by *their* vision of the world (SAP, globalization, privatization, etc.) are urged to take special note of the

ideas contained in this article to incorporate environmental dimensions in their programs in greater measure. They are also urged to be more open and transparent when formulating policy for a country or a region so that their inclusion of environment dimensions can be clearly discerned. This might be done in a spirit of mutual cooperation between themselves, the government agencies, the beneficiaries, and the social night watchmen or watchdog groups to ensure that appropriate environmental protection measures have been incorporated. This would be the preferred modus operandi over the approach in which some international agencies want immunity from being held accountable for making mistakes. Demanding such immunity is antithetical to the values of democracy, transparency, accountability, and ethical norms which they and their funding countries often espouse.

Abul K. Siddique provides key insights suggesting that those enterprises that are not small enough to receive microcredit or large enough to attract commercial lenders must gain access to bank credit to advance their enterprises and, thereby, the pace of development. By their nature and to some extent by design, the micro-enterprises face limits to growth. While being able to sustain themselves based on low levels of credit injection, their capacity to grow is seriously constrained. On the other hand, the large industries, both in the public and private sectors, that have borrowed huge amounts of money from institutional lenders, have been plagued by issues ranging from corruption, loan default, labor union interference, disastrous mismanagement, political influence and the misguided policies of external bodies. It is the "middle" group that offers new hope for a more rapid path to sustained economic growth and that must somehow be able to gain access to credit. How this might be accomplished is spelled out by the author in a reasonably detailed action plan.

M. Musa and G.A. Faruqi provide empirical evidence on the inefficiencies of the capital markets in Bangladesh and reflect on how savvy investors, by manipulating prices, can "beat" the ordinary investors in such inefficient markets. This is likely to dissuade the "burnt" investors from entering the realm once again, thereby barring firms from getting a fair price on their securities. This failure to bring investors and firms together because of the inefficiencies of the capital market in Bangladesh demands further inquiry and innovative solutions from the Securities and Exchange

Commission, the policy makers, and the Dhaka and Chittagong Stock Exchanges. Unless mechanisms are in place to thwart market manipulation by shrewd investors, coupled with introducing greater efficiency in the market, ordinary investors will take their money elsewhere.

M. Ashiqur Rahman examines the on-going conflicts between the tribal people and the settlers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts that has led to violation of human rights, obstruction to sustainable development, and ecosystem destruction. In particular, he examines the “peace accord” signed in December 1997 and its salient features and observes how its “implementation” has been less than satisfactory; in some cases both inter- and intra-group discord has intensified because of lack of implementation of agreed upon measures. The need for peaceful coexistence is now an imperative, not just in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, but also on a wider scale in Bangladesh, especially between the main political parties, religious groups, socio-economic groups, genders and so on. Contentious conflict is debilitating as history has shown all along and its resolution via compromise and cooperation is essential. It is important for the government to promote harmony and mutual trust between the conflicting parties by being fair and just as the mediating party. Otherwise any accord will stand on fragile foundations, ready to degenerate into violent conflagration at the slightest tremor, especially when the balance of power is asymmetrical. The role of external forces must also be factored into the conflict and addressed in bilateral and international forums if the government is committed to de-escalating the conflict and helping the contentious

parties “share” the bounties of the region.

We continue to look for manuscripts that are innovative, insightful, and incisive, and address key development issues of Bangladesh. The articles are expected to provoke debate and challenge researchers, policy makers, development planners, international bodies, and non-government organizations by reviewing existing practices and seeking innovative solutions to bring about “real” change and “real” development. They must also seek to address and uplift conditions in the country that are most in need of change. Hence, papers that challenge the *status quo* are actively sought and deemed desirable.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank once more a wonderful team of editors and manuscript reviewers who continue to provide selflessly of their time. To a large measure the continuation and growth of JBS is the result of their diligence and hard work. Thanks are also due to Sue Pennington of the Sam & Irene Black School of Business at Penn State Erie for attending to the typing and formatting of the papers and to the occasional editors for finding the mistakes many of us make while bringing a manuscript to life.

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