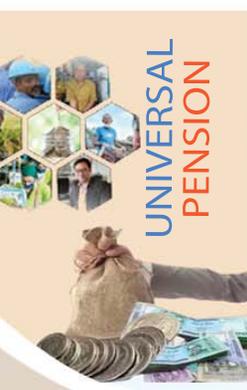


# SMART BANGLADESH

## Road To Wellbeing



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PENSION



Press Information Department  
Ministry Of Information And Broadcasting

# **Smart Bangladesh**

## **Road to Wellbeing**



# Smart Bangladesh

## Road to Wellbeing



**Press Information Department**  
**Ministry of Information and Broadcasting**

# Smart Bangladesh : Road to Wellbeing

## Publication Date

February 2024, Legal Claim ©  
Press Information Department

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## Smart Bangladesh: Road to Wellbeing

Published by Press Information Department (PID)  
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting  
Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka-1000, Phone : 55100811, 55100242,  
Email : pidhaka@gmail.com  
Price : TK. 600.00



**Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**





**Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina**



## P R E F A C E

There is a saying- **‘Only those who can see the invisible can do the impossible.’**

Emerged from the shadows of war to a vibrant democracy with a promising future, Bangladesh has now embarked on the journey towards ‘Smart Bangladesh’. This endeavor of forging a ‘Smart Bangladesh,’ signifies a forward-looking commitment to leveraging cutting-edge technologies and innovative solutions. This visionary pursuit encompasses a multifaceted approach to harnessing the power of digitalization, sustainable planning, and infrastructure development. Bangladesh aspires to create a dynamic and efficient ecosystem that not only enhances the quality of life for its citizens but also positions the nation as a beacon of brilliance in the global landscape of smart, sustainable development.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has announced this master plan on December 12, 2022. The ecosystem will stand on four key pillars – ‘Smart Citizen’, ‘Smart Government’, ‘Smart Society’ and ‘Smart Economy’. The government is taking initiatives through extensive discussions with relevant stakeholders to bring this dream a reality.

The Smart Citizen Pillar consists of 4 key programs around Universal Digital ID, Citizen up-skilling, Digital Collaboration Platforms and Smart Bangladesh Campaign. Each citizen is empowered to make positive changes and contribute to nation-building. They will no longer be looking for a solution from those in “power”, be it in the government or the private sector.

Leave no one behind. If a smart society is an inclusive society that leaves no one behind, then a smart economy does the same for businesses. Smart governance consists of smart education, smart healthcare system, smartland management, smart agriculture, e- marketplace, smart revenue management, smart employability, everything will be under e-governance.

Smart Society will be about creating an inclusive and collaborative society leading a sustainable lifestyle in a Green Bangladesh, where everyone truly is equal. Programs under the same are around inclusive financial ecosystem, Green sustainable Smart Bangladesh, Digital Tolerance & Culture and a Smart Bangladesh technology stack for interoperability.

Smart economy is about achieving a circular economy powered by industry modernization, ICT sector growth, start-up ecosystem build, and enabled by robust technology infrastructure.

We all know that Bangladesh has already gained the foundation for realizing the dream of Honourable Prime Minister for building a Smart Bangladesh. Continuing from Digital Bangladesh Vision 2021, the Bangladesh government has adopted Vision 2041 with the goal of eradicating extreme poverty and achieving high-income country status by 2041. It embeds a collective national aspiration of becoming an advanced economy by transcending the so called 'middle-income trap,' which many Asian countries have not been able to escape.

Bangladesh's digital voyage began with the 2008 election manifesto of the Awami League government, which envisioned the utilization of technological advances to improve the country's economy and the lives of its citizens. The country's narrative of success has been mounted in a variety of fields by the actions taken thus far, ranging from economic transformation and wellbeing of people, to innovation and entrepreneurship, to e-governance and international recognition.

Since 2009, This road towards becoming a digital nation has seen an extraordinary spread of ICT in these past years. Bangladesh has made significant strides in social development, particularly in education, healthcare, and gender equality. The country has achieved near-universal primary education enrollment, and literacy rates have increased steadily. Life expectancy has also improved, from 55 years in 1971 to 72.8 years in 2023.

Bangladesh is currently among the five fastest growing economies in the world, ranking 35th in terms of GDP. It has full filled all the criteria for the graduation to developing country from the LDC status and has been confirmed to be graduated from the LDC in 2026. Today, the per capita income is 5 times higher than it was in 2008. Our gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to grow by 6.5% in FY2024, compared to the 6.0% growth in the previous fiscal year, according to the latest Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The Padma Bridge, an engineering marvel, constructed with our own finance worth over US\$3.8 billion stands as a symbol of the economic transformation of Bangladesh. People are now getting full benefits of some other mega projects such as the Dhaka Metro Rail, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Karnaphuli River Tunnel (the first ever under the river tunnel in South Asia), first ever Elevated Expressway in Dhaka, the 3rd Terminal at Hazrat ShahJalal International Airport. Bangabandhu Satellite-1 and the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (the 33rd Country in the world to produce to produce nuclear power)embody the nation's ambitious aspirations, propelling the country's economic growth. Construction of 564 Model Masjid and Islamic Cultural Centers across

Bangladesh, Deep-Sea Port are other examples of building a smart country.

The country led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has implemented 54 initiatives to strengthen the social safety net programme for the welfare and development of disadvantaged people in the country including the destitute, poor, helpless children, the disabled, adolescents, women (who are mistreated by husbands) and the elderly people. An allocation of Tk 1.26 trillion (Tk 126,272 crore) has been proposed for the social safety net programmes in the budget for FY 2023-24. Identifying the pitfalls of the social protection system and realising the importance of improving it to meet certain objectives, Bangladesh adopted the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) in 2015. The government has allocated Tk 126,272 crore, around 7.4 percent more than last year's social protection allocation of Tk 113,576 crore.

With the aim of inclusive development, cent percent landless-homeless families of 334 upazilas in 21 districts have been rehabilitated in the country under the Ashrayan project. A total of 5 lac 55 thousand 617 landless-homeless families were rehabilitated under this project from 1997 to July 2023—a unique instance in the world. Distribution of over 43 crore free copies of textbooks every year on the 1st of January is another notable initiative. All these programs gained enormous popularity in policy level in order to address the poverty and vulnerability in developing countries.

This compilation book 'Smart Bangladesh: Road to Wellbeing', published by Press Information Department, include these success stories. The articles and features compiled in this book have been disseminated by PID and published in different dailies and news portals. This compilation is enriched with the articles of some profound thinkers, policy makers, political personalities, academia, eminent journalists and government officials.

With the directives of Honourable State Minister of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Mohammad A. Arafat and Honourable Senior Secretary of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Humayun Kabir Khandaker, this book has been brought into the light. It should be noted with gratitude that editorial panel has made a tremendous job to compose the articles in an articulated way.

We hope this publication will be a storage of information about Bangladesh's journey towards a smart country for the researchers and curious readers as well.

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# Bangladesh Is on the Move

**Dr. Atiur Rahman**

Bangladesh has been on the move for over a decade defying all global and local challenges, always demonstrating its inherent inner strengths. Its gains in the economic arena have been particularly eye-catching. Being deeply globalized, Bangladesh could not fully avoid the pandemic's fallouts. When the Bangladesh economy began to come out of pandemic-related hiatus; like most others, it also fell into the challenges created by the sudden Russia-Ukraine war. The war further affected the disrupted supply chains due to the pandemic complications. The food, fuel, and fertilizer prices went up due to such disruptions from the warring countries in the wake of massive economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the Western powers. The persistent tightening of the monetary policy by the Fed made further appreciation of the USD, which accounts for more than forty percent of global trade. The other central banks followed suit in tightening their monetary policies as well. So, the countries like Bangladesh were forced to pay more for their imports creating a huge trade imbalance for themselves. There was an immediate impact on the current account balance leading to both steady depletion of their foreign exchange reserves and devaluation of the domestic currencies against the US dollar. The result has been high inflation and enhanced foreign debt repayment burden. With large exposure to the global economy, Bangladesh also had to face the pressure of the external economic imbalance. However, Bangladesh was fortunate enough to gain valuable lessons from the 2008-09 global financial crisis, for which it has been faring better than many of its peers in coping with the ongoing global economic crisis. During that crisis, Bangladesh followed a cautious economic strategy of inclusive development investing in agriculture, export-earning manufacturing units and low-skilled remitters. The focus was more on creating additional values in its real economy. The developmental central banking following a well-crafted financial inclusion strategy complemented the national economic recovery from the global financial crisis and helped facilitate this value creation. Bangladesh's government and the central bank continued to follow their inclusive fiscal and monetary policies to make their development strategy sustainable until today. That experience of inclusive and sustainable development strategy proved invaluable in shaping our response to the global economic slowdown, created by the pandemic and the mindless war in Europe. We have continued our inclusive development strategy, investing more in agriculture, export,

and remittance augmenting activities and enhancing social protection support for low-income groups.

That Bangladesh benefited from this response strategy is reflected in its gains from increased agricultural production with nearly 43% growth in apparel exports (during January-September 2022) to the European market and modest growth in remittance earnings. The remittance figure from July to December 2022 will likely go up to 10.25 billion USD. The last November's export earnings were more than five billion USD. All this clearly indicates that the export earnings at the end of the current fiscal year will surely surpass sixty billion USD milestones. Thanks to the flexible exchange rate and the existing cash incentive, the remittance too will be more than twenty billion USD with a positive (though modest) growth rate. With some tightening of imports of luxury and non-essential products allowing market-based flexibility in the exchange rate, and an austerity policy on public spending, Bangladesh will surely come out of the woods and demonstrate its macroeconomic resilience leading to the desired stability. The trust in the banking sector, deliberately put in question by a group of vested quarters, is regaining steadily, and the rate of growth of bank deposits has also been increasing. The total debt as a percentage of GDP remains healthy (about 38%), with low-cost and long-term public foreign borrowing remaining below 15%, indicating Bangladesh's strength in debt management. The yearly repayment of debt installments remains low, around two billion USD, and may increase marginally in the coming years. The net foreign exchange reserve situation remains healthy with a capacity to pay around five months' import bills. Undoubtedly, Bangladesh remains a high-risk-free country for foreign investment, as indicated by the IMF and other international development institutions. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the net inflow of FDIs went up to 3.44 billion USD during the 2021-22 fiscal year compared to 913 million USD in 2009-10. The positive response of the IMF, WB, and ADB for enhanced budget and climate-friendly support to weather the ongoing global economic crisis also explains their high confidence level in Bangladesh's macroeconomic management capacity. Also, their estimates of the economic growth rate in this fiscal year align very well with the revised target of Bangladesh's 6.5% GDP growth rate. This will still be a healthy growth rate in a turbulent world.

All this has been made possible by the prolonged macroeconomic stability benefitting from the stronger inclusive and sustainable growth emanating from productive sectors like agriculture, export, and remittance. Therefore, we need to remain focused on the sources of our sustainable growth since 2009, when Bangladesh opted for a paradigm shift of more broad-based growth and human development. The current

leadership's vision for more self-reliant and inclusive development proved highly strategic in an uncertain global economy. The reliance on a higher level of domestic demand and consumption focusing on agriculture, MSMEs, remittance, and export-oriented manufacturing has been providing desired food security, employment, and demand for domestic industrial units leading to a faster decline in poverty and greater growth of human development indicators. In particular, the robust stimulus packages (nearly 6% of GDP) designed to respond to the pandemic-related slowdown of the economy by investing in agriculture, MSMEs, and export-oriented industries, in addition to higher social protection for the low-income groups engaged in the formal sector plus the generous public spending to procure well-rated COVID-vaccines speaks a volume about the strategic vision of the enlightened leadership in Bangladesh. Indeed, the heroic leadership provided by the Premier from the front deserves to be specially highlighted while talking about speedy recovery from the pandemic without undermining the sustained economic activities during the crisis period.

The emphasis on providing more than adequate public investment in agriculture and MSMEs indicates the passionate commitment of the leadership to keeping the bottom of the social pyramid ever stronger with adequate food security and employment, particularly self-employment through enhanced support to small entrepreneurs, including farmers, adding more value to the farm sector. The educated youths have been taking advantage of this public investment support, including robust refinance from the central bank of Bangladesh, and contributing hugely to enhancing modern and diversified agriculture. Not surprisingly, agricultural crop production has increased more than four-fold during the last fifty years. In addition, there have been phenomenal growths in fish, poultry, livestock, and vegetable production, thanks to the continued budgetary support for research, innovation, and extension activities in the rural economy. The rural economy of Bangladesh has also been benefiting hugely from deeper road connectivity, rural electricity, and digital infrastructural support from the government. The support for the start-ups by the government and the central bank in one form or another utilizing ICT Division and development banks like Bangladesh Karma Sangsthan Bank and Ansar-VDP Bank has created several entrepreneurs providing huge employment to other youths. The role of the National Skills Development Authority in providing necessary support for the needed skills and entrepreneurial development also needs to be noted. The related non-farm sector has also grown extensively during this period with about sixty percent of the rural income originating from this sector. The scholarship and other support for primary and secondary education

have not only been providing supplies of low-skilled human resources to the vibrant export-oriented industrial units and the remittance-earning sector but also empowering women with a higher level of income and cultural upliftment through the opportunities of working together. The vibrant entrepreneurship development in both the farm and non-farm sectors has also been facilitated by the focused attention of the central bank of Bangladesh on financial inclusion. The phenomenal growth in bank accounts, including mobile financial services, agent, and internet banking, supported by a strong digital payment system providing an automatic clearing house, electronic fund transfer, real-time gross settlement, and national payment switch in interoperable unified payment interface ('binimoy') have taken Bangladesh economy to a new height.

The impact of all these innovations has been simply stunning on the overall economic gains of the country. The total GDP has increased more than four and a half-fold to USD 465 billion since 2008-09. The export earnings have increased more than three-fold to USD 52 billion during this period. The remittance earnings more than doubled. The economy's resilience has also increased simultaneously, as reflected in savings-GDP improving from 25% to 31%. The share of investment to GDP increased from 26% to 32%. The credit to GDP remains buoyant at 41% even during this difficult time.

So far, Bangladesh has consolidated its macroeconomic stability supported by the broad-based inclusive growth process. This has been a great source of its economic resilience, recording more than double the economic growth of the developing economies at the height of the covid crisis. Now is the time for its quantum jump. Standing on the stronger base created during the first phase of economic consolidation, Bangladesh is now poised for a quantum jump to double-digit growth. Besides dynamic agriculture, MSMEs, and service sectors, the vibrant private sector, including low and high-skilled manufacturing units, will lead this journey towards achieving our cherished goal. This will certainly make Bangladesh smarter and more digital. The private sector can, however, thrive only if there is no infrastructural deficit and a lack of an appropriate business environment. Here comes the government, which, too, ought to be entrepreneurial. Bangladesh, fortunately, has been witnessing this role of the state as reflected in about sustained 10% plus budgetary allocation for the transport and communication infrastructure. Most of the mega projects belong to this category. The allocation is more than 12% in the current fiscal year. This budgetary allocation is destined to facilitate not only the local private sector development but will also help accelerate regional and sub-regional connectivity. The recently launched Padma bridge is a testimony to this

economic development. The transport-related infrastructures like Padma bridge, Kalna bridge, elevated expressways, metro-rail, Bangabandhu tunnel under the Karnafuli, and deep sea and bay ports will take the trade and business services to an additional 33% of the population. The handling capacities of the ports will also improve substantially. The transport-related infrastructures will alone directly add 1.2 percent to the GDP growth. The multiplier effects could be even more if we can use the existing capacity of our domestic shipping services more strategically.

That Bangladesh is on the same growth trajectory as that of South-East Asian countries like Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia can be gauged from its growth in per capita income. In 1980-90, these countries had an average per capita income of USD 2,400. This average figure was pushed up to USD 4,000 in a decade. Bangladesh's per capita income is now USD 2,800. This can easily be pushed up to USD 4,000 in five years. This could be as early as 2026 if we can sustain our inclusive development strategy with robust gains in consumption. Around the time when the South-East Asian countries lifted their average per capita income from USD 2,400 to USD 4,000, consumption increased by 12%. Bangladesh can increase its average consumption by 10% to 12% by 2026.

Cashing on such potential, the Boston Consultancy Group, in a recent study, has projected that Bangladesh will have a trillion USD economy by 2030 if its growth rate can be pushed up to 10%. Even with a 5% growth trajectory, it can become the same in 2040. I think Bangladesh will become a trillion-dollar economy well before 2035 if there is an end to this mindless war in Ukraine. The group has estimated that the high-income group population will reach 3.4 million by 2025 from 1.9 million in 2020. These are people with perhaps 5,000 USD plus per capita income. The growth in their income will mean a bigger market for tech-savvy and brand-savvy products and services. The Special Economic Zones, nearly completed, will attract more FDIs to cater to their demands. This dream project presupposes continuity and consistency in visionary and supportive well-coordinated economic policies that have been abundant during the last 12-13 years. Suppose we can continue to put our trust in the legacy of committed leadership, reaping its strength from the fountain of inspiration of Bangabandhu's dream project of Sonar Bangla, which has already been delivering the desired services and focusing on our homegrown, innovative, and indigenous inclusive development, Bangladesh will surely progress towards its prosperous and smarter trajectory. Indeed, leadership matters.

\*The author is a noted economist and former Governor of Bangladesh Bank.

# Bangladesh Development Surprise: 2009-2020

**Dr. Shamsul Alam**

Bangladesh economy is rising. The rise is unprecedented and surprising. Probably, no other country's story of success has been subject to so wider discussion in international arena, than that of Bangladesh during the last decade. Recently, the issue has shined in the headlines following a report by International Monetary Fund (IMF). The report says, Bangladesh will overtake India in terms of per capita GDP in December, 2020. Due to Corona pandemic, per capita GDP of India will be shrunk by 10.3 percent to 1877 US\$ while Bangladesh will achieve a 4 percent rise of GDP to 1888 US\$. The fact is even couple of years before; per capita income of India was significantly higher than that of Bangladesh. Per capita income of Bangladesh has more than tripled since 2009. An estimate by Hong Kong Shanghai Banking Corporation reports, Bangladesh will be among 26th largest economy by 2030. Centre for Economics and Business Research of the UK projected Bangladesh will become 25<sup>th</sup> that largest economy in the world by 2035. In 2018, Bangladesh has earned praise from its global peers after meeting all criteria for graduation from Least Developed Country status to a developing country. As of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, graduation to Developing country from Least Developed Country will elevate the prestige of Bangladesh. It will raise the confidence and strength level of political leaders. Bangladesh's success in social indicators such as education, health, infant mortality, life expectancy along with economic indicators, has been remarkable. Through launching of Bangabandhu satellite, Bangladesh entered into a new era of communication technologies. So what are the underlying factors that have driven this success we may focus into?

## **Visionary leadership and the charter of change**

The present government came in power after winning a landslide victory in 2008 election with election manifesto of "Charter for Change". That manifesto indeed laid foundation for the Vision 2021 or Digital Bangladesh. The Present government started its journey at a time when both economic and political situations were abysmal. There was widespread prevalence of terrorism, corruption, inefficiency, mismanagement. Further, power sector was mired in extreme deficiency, and health, education, agriculture and transport sector were stuck in sluggishness. The government

formulated first perspective Plan 2010-2021 of Bangladesh with the aim to eradicate hunger, poverty, illiteracy. Priorities of the government at that time was attaining economic stability and curbing inflation, effective action against corruption, ensuring economic usage of oil, gas, coal, hydro power, wind power and solar energy, elimination of poverty and inequity, establishment of good governance. Digital Bangladesh was built on four pillars-digital government, human resource development, development of ICT and promotion of industry and connecting citizens. The philosophy underlying the vision 2021 includes improving the lives of people by ensuring democracy, people's right, transparency, accountability, ensuring delivery of government services to the citizen's doorsteps. With deft and visionary leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Digital Bangladesh is now a reality, not a utopia.

### **Success in MDGs**

The last decade has been unforgettable for Bangladesh being awarded with number of international accolades and praises. Among all of those, successes in MDGs remained the most glowing. As an individual, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina prided the country by receiving numerous awards from countries and international organizations. Bangladesh was accorded first award on MDGs for reducing child mortality from UNDP in 2010. The next year, International telecommunication Union, UN Economic Commission together conferred Bangladesh with the South-South Award. Other important awards include United Nations World Food Organization's (FAO) Diploma Award in 2013 for reducing poverty and malnutrition, South-South Award for ensuring food security and reducing poverty, ICT Sustainable Development Award in 2015, UN Environment Award, Planet 50:50, from UN Women Agent of Change, Global Women Leadership Award by Global Summit of Women in 2018 for Women leadership. Other achievements for the Prime Minister are the International Achievement Award and Special Distinct Award for Leadership from IPS International in 2018, Vaccine Hero by Global Alliance for Vaccine and Immunization (GAVI) in 2019, Champion for Skill Development for Youth from UNICEF in 2019. Bangladesh received the prestigious UN Public Service Award 2020 for promotion of transparent and accountable government institutions in 2020. It is a long list indeed for the last decade. This paves the way for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (2016-2030).

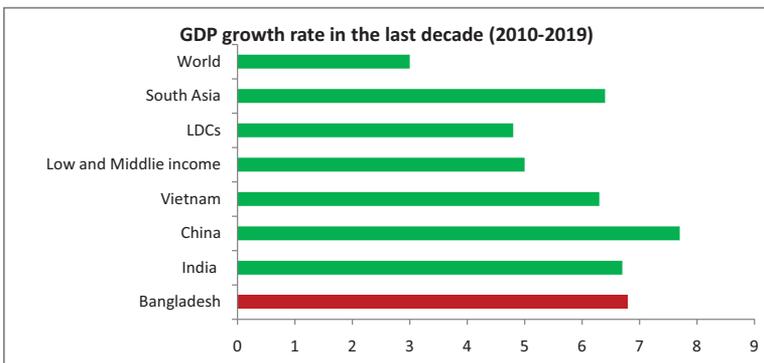
### **Middle Income country and graduation from LDC to a Developing Country**

2021 will be the year of the golden Jubilee of Bangladesh's independence. Vision 2021 is prepared bearing in mind the milestone targets to

be attained by 2021. The main goal of the Vision 2021 was to make Bangladesh a middle income country by 2021. Countries are classified into four categories by income according to World Bank Classification as lower income country, lower middle income country, upper middle income country, high income country. Bangladesh crossed the threshold of lower middle income country in 2015. Bangladesh attained another glaring success by meeting all criteria for graduation from LDC status to a developing country by UN, CDP (Committee for Development Policy). Three conditions are to cross threshold of per capita income, human asset index and economic vulnerability. Very recent update from UN shows Bangladesh is most likely to meet all criteria for the second time in February 2021 again. As a result, Bangladesh will be considered a developing country in 2024. Mainly, the above two glaring successes boost the confidence of policy makers to devise a plan for Vision 2041, the broad goals of which are to become an upper middle income country by 2031 and a high income country by 2041.

### Progress in socio-economic indicators

As like of economic progress, progress in social indicators have also been in similar pace. In the last decade, Bangladesh stands second in terms of GDP growth rate in the world. Bangladesh even left behind India in GDP growth rate. Recently foreign reserve risen all time high to 42 billion US dollar, which was just 7.5 billion US dollar in 2007. Other important factor of the economy, remittance increased to 18.2 billion US dollar in 2019-20 from merely 9.7 billion dollars in 2009. The following graph depicts a comparison of growth rate across the globe.



Source: World Bank

Since 2009, foreign direct investment increased five times. This will be even accelerated further, if 100 economic zones many of which are under

construction and when fully operationalized. In the meantime, some of works have already been completed and the flow of investment started poured in. Investors from China, India, Singapore, Japan, and Korea are showing great interest in Bangladesh. Further, mega projects if completed will facilitate buoyant economic activities. The biggest underlying strength of Bangladesh economy is domestic consumption. The market for 165 million people is huge. Perspective Plan 2021-2041 projects foreign direct investment to be around 3 percent of GDP. One of the targets of Vision 2021 was to be self-sufficient in food grain production by 2012. Bangladesh already achieved self-sufficiency in food grain. One of the successes of Bangladesh is more than tripling rice production.

The last decade is also characterized by success of poverty reduction. According to BBS estimate, each year on an average poverty has been reduced by one percentage point in the last decade. Extreme poverty also declined by around one percentage point. World Bank estimate shows the incidence of poverty by 1.90 dollar PPP per person fell down to 9.2 percent in 2019 from 14.8 percent in 2016. Commendable progress is also made in reducing malnutrition. Rate of malnutrition fell to 13 percent in 2017-2019 (3 years average) from 16.6 percent in 2008-2010. Gross enrollment rate in the secondary schools increased to 72.6 percent in 2019 from merely 48.8 percent in 2009.

Social progress has been attained mainly by reduction in maternal mortality, reduction in infant mortality, neonatal mortality, under-5 mortality. The following graph shows the change in the last decade.

Year	Maternal mortality (per 100000 live birth)	Neo natal mortality (per 1000 live birth)	Infant mortality (per 1000 live birth)	Under 5 mortality rate (per 1000 live birth)
2009	259	28	39	50
2019	165	15	21	28

Neo natal mortality rate, Infant mortality rate, Under 5 mortality rate were made possible to reduce by half in the last decade. Inclusive growth requires massive investment in health, education, social protection, infrastructure and research which drew high attention of the Government during the last decade. Along with improving business environment, private investment will be encouraged to generate employment. The government is now eyeing on building knowledge based society, curbing corruption, employment generation as part of implementing Vision 2041.

*The Author is Member (Senior Secretary), General Economics Division, Bangladesh Planning Commission*

# **Bangladesh: Journey of Growth with Resolute Steps**

**Qazi Khaliqzaman Ahmad**

The Bangladesh economy was in crisis immediately after independence. Agriculture was stalled, industries were closed, infrastructures including communication network were devastated, the banks were without money and the foreign exchange reserve was empty. The state machinery was crippled and the number of countries according recognition to Bangladesh was only two (India and Bhutan). Besides, about 10 million refugees had returned from India and there were innumerable people inside the country who had witnessed the destruction of their family-based economy. All these destitute people were dependent on relief supplies for food intake. After returning to the country on 10 January 1972 and assuming responsibility of the state, Bangabandhu set about chalking the recovery path of the country from this precarious situation with a firm hand. He got only three and a half years for the purpose. But he was able to lay a foundation for advancing the nation within this short period. A famine-like situation was created in the country in 1974 due to excessive rains, repeated floods, resultant disruptions in communication system and hoarding of food by some greedy people. He overcame this disaster very swiftly and again concentrated on planning the path of the country's progress towards the end of 1974.

Bangabandhu announced a plan for building a cooperative-based state and accelerating national development at the start of 1975. He expressed the firm resolve to follow that path with the goal of building a golden Bangla in line with the spirit of independence. That is, he spoke about forging forward through fair inclusion of all, so that people could live with human dignity in a society free from exploitation and discrimination and enjoy all human rights in accordance with the proclamation of independence. The plan envisaged one cooperative in each village. Land and property belonging to any person could not be seized, but various economic activities would have to be run collectively by the villagers. The owners of land or other properties would get a fair share of the outputs and income. The cooperatives would get a share, and from that the workers would elicit their dues with a portion deposited in state treasury. Village development funds were envisaged under each village cooperative. A chunk of this fund would come from the cooperative itself,

but needed funds would also be allocated from government budget. It was quite a progressive idea, where growth and inclusivity would have journeyed together. The government would have directly received the required wealth for building a poverty-free modern state.

Discrimination is now on the rise in market economies. The government extracts negligible amounts through taxation, especially from direct tax. Even after combining the direct and indirect taxes, the Tax-GDP ratio is less than 9 per cent in Bangladesh, whereas it is 18 per cent in neighbouring Nepal. After the announcement by Bangabandhu in 1975, the vested quarters saw that they would not be able to pile up their wealth and power if Bangabandhu's proposed development path was executed. I feel that these fortune-seekers also joined hands with the local and foreign conspirators to remove Bangabandhu quickly through conspiracy, and they were successful. After the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu, a process was started for running the economy in a different direction. The country started to walk on the path of market economy and capitalism. The progress achieved during the decade of 1980s was however negligible. Development could not be expedited even during the 1990s. But the Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina took a laudable measure in the second half of that decade, which was to extend agricultural subsidies. The country was highly aid-dependent even at that juncture. The international aid agencies and the countries who were bilateral development partners strongly objected to that subsidy. But ignoring this, the then Sheikh Hasina government extended substantial amounts of subsidies, as a result of which Bangladesh became almost self-sufficient in food-grain production by 2000.

The average growth rate of the economy was 5.8% from 2000 to 2010, but it lacked continuity. Development could not be expedited in other sectors as well. Rather, there was a visible shakiness. Starting from the fiscal year 2011 (2010-11) up to 2019 fiscal year followed by the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, continuous and accelerated growth was achieved in both economic growth as well as some vital social indicators. The growth rate was over 6 per cent during the first five years. It was 7 per cent during the following three years, and it was 8.2 per cent in 2019. Not many countries of the world could witness this kind of sustained progress. Side by side, remittance receipts also increased very fast. It rose to 18.2 billion US dollar in 2019-20 from 9.6 billion US dollar in 2008-09. As a consequence, the per capita income also rose and reached 1909 US dollar in 2019. Besides, the export receipts, especially readymade garments export, rose significantly. Due to rapid rise in remittances and export receipts, the foreign currency reserve also

piled up quickly (it was USD 12.7 billion in December 2010, USD 43.2 billion in December 2019, and USD 41.5 billion in November 2021). If we look at the social indicators, it is seen that life expectancy at birth has jumped to 73 years, which was only 46 years in 1972. The maternal and child mortality rates have declined notably, and Bangladesh now leads the South Asian countries in the area of women's empowerment. The literacy rate rose to 74 per cent in 2019, which was 47 per cent in 2007. There has been a massive construction drive in educational infrastructure sector, especially for buildings of educational institutions belonging to different levels (primary, secondary, and college) across the country. Enrolment rate at the primary level has now reached almost 100 per cent. The drop-out rates at both primary and secondary levels have gone down noticeably.

Swift progress has been achieved in the rural economy in both farm and non-farm sectors. Both the sectors are receiving official supports. Especially, subsidies and credits have been significantly enhanced in the agriculture sector. The poverty rate came down to 20.5 per cent in 2019, which was 40 per cent in 2005. The hard-core poverty rate was about 11 per cent. Alongside agricultural development and other measures, food for works program, allowances for the aged, maternity allowance etc. under the social safety net program of the government, and other poverty alleviation endeavours have played a part in the reduction of poverty. About 2.6 per cent of GDP was spent in this sector during the fiscal year 2019-20.

Quite naturally, a question is often posed: How was this success possible? My answer is: it could materialise mainly for two reasons. One was a favourable official policy framework and supports; the other has been the hard labour of all citizens in the surrounding environment. They included the farmers, the farm labourers, other workers, entrepreneurs ranging from very small to large ones, educationists, trainers, those who play advisory roles, and all other concerned people.

Programs are being consciously run for tackling the impacts of climate change. Climate change strategy paper and action plan have been formulated in Bangladesh. They provide guidelines about management, required actions, project concepts, setting of priorities and implementation of programs. Sustained pressure is being exerted on the developed countries and developing nations undergoing rapid industrialisation for reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions (cause of climate change) swiftly and adequately. Similar pressure is also being exerted for extension of financial and technological assistance to low income countries by the developed nations. Besides, adaptation programs

are being especially implemented for tackling the impact through own funding and management as well based on own capacity. Still, that is quite insufficient compared to real need. Foreign assistance is therefore urgently needed, but its receipt has been minimal till now. However, Bangladesh's adaptation programs are being lauded everywhere. In the final analysis, if the developed world does not reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions quickly, the situation would deteriorate very soon on a massive scale, which would be very difficult to tackle effectively by both developed and developing states. In any case, the situation in Bangladesh is already fragile. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh has been highlighting this situation on the global stage quite forcefully for a long time. She did the same during the COP-26 conference held in Glasgow recently.

I have briefly presented the achievements of Bangladesh that was lauded by the global community prior to the pandemic. I have also mentioned about climate change, which is hampering socioeconomic advancement, and I also pointed out the efforts for overcoming this challenge. Now, let us dwell on the other challenges. In this respect, the Covid-19 pandemic comes first. This pandemic has been striking Bangladesh in varying degrees since March 2020. But while many countries stumbled, Bangladesh led by Sheikh Hasina has shown lot of efficiency and success in both saving lives and ensuring livelihoods. Saving lives entailed testing for the novel corona virus, treatment of those infected, making arrangements for inoculation after procuring vaccines, making people aware about preventive measures against the virus, and extending assistance (food and financial) to those whose livelihoods have been threatened. Incentives have also been extended to entrepreneurs for sustaining their production and service ventures. Notable successes have been achieved in these areas, as a result of which rates of infections and deaths are under control. Many capable individuals and institutions have joined hands with the government for extending assistance to the socioeconomically devastated citizens. As a result, not much lamentation is observed.

Bangladesh has achieved enviable success in the area of economic growth during the pandemic times. Most of the countries in the world have recorded negative growth rates during 2020 and 2021. But Bangladesh has been among a few countries that could achieve positive growth. Not only that, Bangladesh is one of the handful-few who could achieve around 5 per cent growth rate during the episode. The per capita income has therefore risen to 2,554 US dollar towards the end of 2021. The growth rate is projected to rise further during the current year, as the

economy has started to bounce back swiftly. If the pandemic does not worsen much, then Bangladesh would return to the path of accelerated growth after overcoming the crisis. But more emphasis should be placed in this recovery and rejuvenation process on those who have lagged behind – especially the micro and small entrepreneurs cum businesses as well as those whose poverty situation has exacerbated. Otherwise, discriminations in the country would rise, as a result of which the process of sustainable development would be seriously hindered. There is a need for paying special attention to this area.

Apart from the pandemic, a few other vitally important problems have also been identified. Many of those were mentioned in the election manifesto of the Awami League in 2018. Urgent steps should be taken for resolving these problems, especially for implementation of sustainable development goals and for building the country in the spirit of the liberation war. The identified problems in the manifesto were as follows:

Democratic values and spirit shall be upheld; there shall be unfettered scope for obtaining legal refuge and assistance for all citizens; the independence of the judiciary shall be preserved and upheld; proper arrangements shall be made for ensuring human rights of all, and any attempt to violate human rights shall be resisted; an efficient, corruption-free, just, service-oriented and accountable administrative system shall be built up; allocation of responsibilities at different tiers (i.e. district council, upazila council, and union council) of local government shall be specified, and these would be made effective through trained manpower and funding; work shall continue for grooming people-friendly law enforcement agencies; ‘zero tolerance’ policy against corruption has been announced; stringent measures shall be taken for combating bribery, unearned incomes, black money, extortion, loan-defaults, tender-captures and muscle-power, and corruption cum criminality shall be eliminated; a resolute stand shall be taken for zero tolerance against militancy, communalism, terrorism and drugs; and plans and programs shall be strengthened alongside enhancing financial allocations for reinforcing these to remove discriminations. Identification of these problems demonstrates the farsightedness of the Awami League leadership, especially that of Sheik Hasina. Identification of problems is in fact a precondition for their solution.

Bangladesh is advancing forward, and we seek to express the resolve that it will continue to do so. I want to have faith that we shall march ahead with resolute steps with the objective of implementing sustainable development goals by 2030, transforming the country into an inclusive higher middle-income country by 2031, and building a golden Bangla of

Bangabandhu based on the spirit of liberation war under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by solving newly-emerged problems, and through consolidation of our positive attributes.

*The writer is a freedom fighter, economist, social thinker, expert on environment and climate change, and winner of Independence Award and Ekushey Padak.*

*Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed*

# Multidimensional Plans Making Bangladesh Investment Hub

**AKM Kamal Uddin Chowdhury**

Bangladesh is moving forward to become a developed country by achieving remarkable success in socio-economic indicators and ensuring a favourable climate for trade and investment.

Experts observe that the availability of workforce at a competitive wage, growing domestic market demand and the favourable policy are some of the key factors that is making Bangladesh an attractive hub for investment.

According to the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Bangladesh rose by 68 per cent to US\$3.6 billion in 2018 which was \$2.6 billion in the previous calendar year.

Different statistics show that Bangladesh witnessed high volume of investment from both local and foreign sources over the last couple of years as the government offered a number of incentives by adopting a time-befitting industrial policy, export growth strategy and public-private partnership programme.

For attracting investors, the government is providing all sorts of policy supports to the investors through different organizations, including BIDA, Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA), Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) and Bangladesh Hi-Tech Park Authority (BHTPA).

In the fiscal 2018-19, as per BIDA's statistic, the authority gave registrations to 1,368 industrial units under local, joint venture and 100 percent foreign investment scheme that promised investment of \$13,662.34 million including \$5,253.24 million FDI with creating job opportunities for more than 1,66,157 people.

According to the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA), the operating enterprises of eight Export Processing Zones (EPZs) of BEPZA gained an investment of \$333.38 million, exported goods worth \$7524.11 million and created employment opportunities for 19,548 Bangladeshi nationals in the last fiscal 2018-19.

With the aim of expediting and increasing industrialization, new jobs, production and export diversification, BEZA is working to develop 100

economic zones on 75,000 acres of land in the country by 2030 which would also generate over 1 crore employments and additional \$ 40 billion export.

Out of the 100 SEZs, the governing body of BEZA has already approved 88 SEZs. BEZA has already acquired 33,594.53 acres of land in the 22 government SEZs.

BEZA has also handed over pre-qualification licenses to the 20 organizations for establishing private economic zones. In the SEZs, a total of 17 industries have already set up while works of the 19 industries are ongoing.

BIDA Former Executive Chairman Kazi Aminul Islam said the flow of investment in the country showed an upward trend in the last couple of years due to taking different pragmatic measures of the government under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

He said Bangladesh offers an unparalleled investment climate compared to the other South Asian economies as the country is a largely homogeneous society with no major internal or external tensions and a population with great resilience in the face of adversity and it maintains a liberal democracy.

“Investors of the country have been enjoying some of the world’s most competitive fiscal and non-fiscal incentives, including remittance of royalty, technical know-how and technical assistance fees, repatriation facilities of dividend and capital,” he added.

To promote a more sustainable and inclusive investment environment, the BIDA chief said, BIDA has undertaken steps for massive reforms to ensure creation of a true one-stop service for the investors, facilitate the development of entrepreneurs.

To improve Bangladesh’s current ranking of 176 out of the 190 economies mentioned in the ‘Ease of Doing Business’ report to a ‘double digit’ ranking by 2021, Aminul Islam said BIDA has started to collaborate with different ministries and agencies to implement the necessary reform recommendations.

Recently, BIDA has taken an initiative to create 24,000 trained entrepreneurs within two years in line with one of the Prime Minister’s 10 initiatives – ‘Investment Development’, he informed.

Aminul Islam said BIDA has taken multidimensional plans to create entrepreneurs at the grassroots level. As per the plans, BIDA has set a target for two years to create 24,000 skilled entrepreneurs across the country, he added.

To achieve the target, he said BIDA has already taken a project titled 'Entrepreneurship Creation and Skill Development'.

"Under the project, each entrepreneur will take one-month training from the district level training center," he added.

Through the training programme, the BIDA chief said, trainees can gather necessary knowledge about how to start a business and its challenges, market analysis, capital collection process and other related issues.

"In the training, BIDA will also motivate the youths about business through removing their wrong perception so they can make them self-reliant," he added.

Project Director of the 'Entrepreneurship Creation and Skill Development' project Abul Khair Mohammad Hafizullah Khan informed that training programme has already started where BIDA is providing training to 25 entrepreneurs every month in each district and the training programme will run for 15 months.

"After 15 months, a total of 375 entrepreneurs in every district will complete their training. The project will also run for more three months for monitoring the entrepreneurs," he added.

In every district, he said a support center will be established for providing necessary supports to the trainees.

He mentioned that BIDA has already selected district-wise potential sectors so the trainees can gather knowledge as per their requirement.

"After taking training, every trainee will be the BIDA's registered entrepreneurs. We will introduce them to different financial institutions, including Bangladesh Bank and SME Foundation, to solve their capital problem," he informed.

Hafizullah Khan said BIDA will also make a database comprising the information of national and international entrepreneurs and investment to create an interaction among the investors.

"Suppose, someone has huge land, but he has no capital. Another one has capital, but no land. We will act as mediator between them to start a business," he added.

He informed that BIDA will also develop an online learning platform so anyone from home and abroad, who wants to invest in Bangladesh, gets all information online with a click.

# **Bangladesh Seeks Effective Partnerships for Rapid Progress**

**Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed**

The Eleventh Jatiya Sangsad election held in Bangladesh on 30 December 2018 has been a significant milestone for sustaining parliamentary democracy and socio-economic progress in the country. Democracy and development are complementary to each other. Development is a continuous process, and concerted efforts cum active participation and support of the masses are required for this. The Awami League government has succeeded in ensuring massive development in all sectors of the country through wholehearted participation of the people. The living standard of the general masses has been improved and social harmony in the country has been enhanced. Despite a global recessionary trend, budgetary allocations in Bangladesh have been raised manifold, national income has increased significantly, and notable advances have been made in different sectors. This is evidenced from numerous accolades and recognitions accorded to Bangladesh in the international arena.

In the backdrop of rapid socio-economic growth in the country during the past decade, yet another conference of Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF 2020) gets underway in Dhaka from 29-30 January. Organized by the Economic Relations Division (ERD) of the Ministry of Finance, this biennial event provides a platform for constructive dialogues among the development partners, NGOs, development think-tanks cum practitioners, and leaders from industrial cum business communities, mainly to hold dialogues on the development priorities, policies and potentials of Bangladesh. The stakeholders will again get an opportunity to identify the execution challenges and policy cum resource gaps as well as strengthen existing partnerships. The last meeting of BDF was held in January 2018, which was attended by the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and other multilateral cum bilateral development partners.

The BDF-2020 is being held in the backdrop of several significant milestones looming in the horizon for Bangladesh and its people. These include the observance of first anniversary of the Awami League government that assumed office in January last year for a consecutive third term. The country is also poised to celebrate the birth centenary

of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from March this year. And the coming year marks the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence. Implementation of the Seventh Five Year Plan (7FYP, 2016-20) is also nearing completion and the government will soon launch the Eighth Five Year Plan (8FYP, 2020-25) from July this year. The country is also set to graduate from the status of a least developed country (LDC) to that of a developing one with effect from 2024, provided that is approved by the triennial review of the UN in 2021. Besides, following the progresses made in achieving millennium development goals (MDGs), the country is striving hard to realize the global sustainable development goals (SDGs) by the year 2030.

Led by Bangabandhu's illustrious daughter Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has achieved remarkable progress in many socio-economic sectors over the past eleven years. The average GDP growth rate during the period has been an astounding 6.67 percent, with the figure reaching a record 8.15 percent during 2018-19 fiscal. The World Bank classified Bangladesh as a lower-middle income country back in 2015, and the country could satisfy all criteria in 2018 for graduating from the LDC status. The government has also succeeded in maintaining a low inflation rate. The foreign exchange reserves have reached record levels, and the fiscal deficits as well as Debt-GDP ratio have been kept under tight control.

***Writer : Former Additional Secretary***

# **Bangladesh's Foreign Policy and Importance of FDI**

**Dr. A K Abdul Momen, MP**

Bangladesh, a country situated in South Asia, has been actively pursuing a foreign policy aimed at promoting peace, stability, and economic development both domestically and internationally. Bangladesh always practices the foreign policy dictum of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman- 'Friendship to all, malice towards none'. Bangabandhu's daughter, our current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina successfully implemented the vision of Bangabandhu and uphold Bangladesh's global images by becoming a continuous voice on the issues such as climate change, culture of peace, women empowerment, rights of the developing countries, sustainable development goals, equal opportunity for economic development etc. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs actively engage with the countries and international and regional organizations to get the maximum benefit for Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's foreign policy is guided by several key objectives that contribute to the country's overall development. Firstly, Bangladesh aims to safeguard its national interests by ensuring regional stability and security. The country actively engages in diplomatic efforts to build strong bilateral and multilateral relations with neighboring countries and the international community. Secondly, Bangladesh seeks to promote international and regional cooperation through organizations such as United Nations, Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Commonwealth, World Trade Organization (WTO), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) etc. These platforms provide opportunities for political dialogues, economic integration, trade facilitation, and the exchange of ideas and resources. Additionally, Bangladesh pursues an active role in global affairs, advocating for the interests of developing countries and participating in international forums. The country supports peacekeeping missions and contributes to humanitarian efforts worldwide. Bangladesh's foreign policy objectives aim to establish the nation as a responsible global player while addressing its domestic needs and aspirations.

In the Foreign Ministry, we are actively engaged in two broad areas of diplomacy—Public Diplomacy and Economic Diplomacy. Public

diplomacy works include improving the brand image of Bangladesh in the global sphere, establishing Bangladesh Brand theme, increase people to people contact both in home and abroad, disseminating information about the work of the Foreign Ministry and its 81 Missions, and work against any propaganda activities that are harmful for Bangladesh. In the economic diplomacy part, we are involved with five categories of activities – increase the export earnings of Bangladesh, export product diversification, attract significant amount of foreign direct investment every year, transfer of technology in the Bangladesh's industrial and service sectors and ensure suitable employment for our expert manpower in the global and regional institutions/industries/service sectors and provide quality services. For completing and monitoring the whole gamut of economic diplomacy, we have established a separate International Trade, Investment and Technology Wing in the ministry. This wing wholeheartedly works on the economic diplomacy areas to ensure maximum economic benefit for Bangladesh.

One of the key components of economic diplomacy is Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) which plays a pivotal role in Bangladesh's economic growth and development strategy. It serves as a catalyst for job creation, technology transfer, infrastructure development, and the overall enhancement of productive capacities. FDI contributes to the diversification of industries, boosts export potential, and helps attract foreign expertise and knowledge. FDI inflows have a significant impact on the economy by providing a steady source of capital, which can be utilized for investment in critical sectors such as manufacturing, energy, telecommunications, and infrastructure. This inflow of foreign capital strengthens the domestic investment base, stimulates economic activities, and creates employment opportunities. Furthermore, FDI brings along technological advancements and managerial expertise, which can have a transformative effect on local industries. Foreign investors often introduce modern production techniques, research and development capabilities, and efficient management practices, leading to increased productivity and competitiveness. Several factors contribute to the attractiveness of Bangladesh as a destination for foreign direct investment. Understanding these factors helps identify the country's strengths and opportunities for further improvement.

**Stable Macroeconomic Environment:** A stable macroeconomic environment is a crucial factor for attracting FDI. Bangladesh has demonstrated macroeconomic stability with steady economic growth, low inflation, manageable public debt, and a stable exchange rate in the last 14 years. The Awami League government's prudent fiscal policies

and sound monetary measures have instilled confidence in foreign investors. In the last couple of years, we see an uprising trend of FDI in Bangladesh.

**Investment Incentives and Policies:** Bangladesh offers a range of investment incentives and policies to attract foreign investors. These include tax holidays, duty exemptions on capital machinery imports, reduced tariffs on raw materials, and repatriation facilities for profits and dividends, avoidance of double taxation, foreign investment guarantee, etc. Additionally, the government has implemented a “One Stop Service” to streamline administrative processes and provide faster approvals for investment projects.

**Infrastructure Development:** The government has made substantial investments in infrastructure development, including roads, ports, power plants, digitalization, Hi-Tech Parks and special economic zones (SEZs). These initiatives aim to improve connectivity, reduce transportation costs, and provide dedicated areas for foreign investors. We have constructed the Padma Bridge, the Metro Rail network in the mega city Dhaka, the Karnaphuli tunnel under the river, the Nuclear Power Plant, and all the main highways of Bangladesh have been upgraded to four lane capacity. The government also takes many other infrastructure projects to improve the overall connectivity across the country. Bangladesh is well connected with the neighboring countries through roads, rails and air network.

Sheikh Hasina’s government has already declared to establish ‘Smart Bangladesh’ by 2041 and taken necessary policies to develop Smart Citizen, Smart Economy, Smart Government and Smart Society. To make this vision of the Prime Minister successful, we need to upgrade our activities and ways of doing work to a new height so that we can compete with the fast-changing world. My Ministry has already works on practicing Smart Foreign Policy which will be more focused on ensuring the national interest of Bangladesh and increasing the trade and business capabilities. Smart Foreign Policy of Bangladesh will use the frontier technology tools to carry forward our diplomatic works. Foreign ministry and its 81 Missions are well prepared to take the challenges of this time and the time ahead. Together we will achieve our goals to become a developed state by 2041.

***Writer: Former Foreign Minister, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh.***

***PID Feature***

# **Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) 2020: Partnering for Sustainable Development**

**Abdul Baki**

Economic Relations Division (ERD), Ministry of Finance is organizing Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) 2020 on 29-30 January 2020 at Bangabandhu International Conference Center, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka, Bangladesh. BDF is a high-level multi-stakeholder participatory forum, periodically hosted by the Economic Relations Division (ERD), Ministry of Finance, which provides a platform for effective dialogues among development partners, national and international NGOs, development think-tanks, development practitioners, leaders from business and industry. It creates opportunity for building partnership among the stakeholders for identifying implementation challenges and policies or resource gaps.

The previous edition was held in January 2018 and was inaugurated by the Honorable Prime Minister H.E. Sheikh Hasina. BDF 2018 brought together about 700 delegates representing Bangladesh government and various development partners, including UN, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and others. The two-day event focused on the implementation review of Bangladesh's 7th Five Year Plan (7FYP) along with the resource and policy gaps in attaining the SDGs.

The BDF 2020 is going to be held at a time when Bangladesh is at a defining juncture in its development journey. The BDF 2020 will be an occasion to recount the achievements and lessons learned during the 7FYP. Critically BDF 2020 will shed light on Bangladesh's strategic choices to reach three milestones, i.e., smooth and sustainable LDC graduation by 2024, SDGs by 2030 and become a developed country by 2041. Hence, with due considerations for the political commitment of the Government, enshrined in the Election Manifesto, BDF 2020 will be a perfect opportunity to identify areas of partnership for 8FYP.

The country has witnessed impressive progress in almost all development parameters over the last decade under the leadership of the Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Bangladesh has sustained robust economic growth over the last ten years averaging 6.67 percent since FY 2009. GDP growth for the Fiscal Year 2019 reached 8.15 percent—the highest in the country's history. This came on the back of more than 7

percent GDP growth during the three previous fiscal years. The country gained the lower-middle income status back in 2015 by World Bank Classification and met all the criteria to graduate from the least developed country status in March 2018. Prudent macroeconomic management in recent years has also helped to keep inflation within reasonable limits, to build up foreign exchange reserves, to hold the currency exchange rate steady, to restrain fiscal deficits, and to shrink external debt as percentage of GDP.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh has continued to make impressive progress in various key socio-economic indicators. The average life expectancy in Bangladesh is now 72.8 years. On the other hand, infant mortality of less than 5 years per thousand live births has gone down to 31, infant mortality rate of less than 1 year has gone down to 24, and maternal mortality rate per thousand is now only 1.72 persons. Success in poverty reduction was particularly spectacular as both depth and severity of poverty have declined significantly. The headcount poverty reduced to 20.5 percent in 2019 from 40.0 percent in 2005 and the hard-core poverty reduced to 10.5 percent in 2018 from 25.1 percent in 2005. Bangladesh's impressive progress is now being applauded globally as the country has been termed as a 'Role Model of Development' at the world stage.

However, in line with the remarkable progress that has been made over the years, the next decade would be a defining period in the development journey of Bangladesh. Following the successful implementation of Millennium Development Goals, the country is currently in the midst of executing the global Agenda for Sustainable Development. Successful implementation of these global goals is essential for ensuring Bangladesh's development paradigm remains socioeconomically inclusive as well as environmentally sustainable. While graduating from the Least Developed Country status is a major achievement for Bangladesh, the country also has to prepare itself for new trade rules and regulations that would be applicable once it officially graduates. The country also strives to improve its infrastructure, business climate and the quality of its workforce. Tackling the impacts of climate change remain a major development priority.

Against the above backdrop, stronger partnership between government, development partners, private sector, civil society and non-governmental organizations would be crucial to ensure that the development gains that have been made over the years can be sustained and can become more dynamic and inclusive, where BDF 2020 would play a very significant account.

The forum of BDF 2020 will provide an ideal platform for assessing the progress made in implementing the 7th FYP. At the same time, it would also provide an opportunity for a wide ranging multi stakeholder consultation for formulating the upcoming 8th Five Year Plan.

The upcoming BDF 2020 would also provide a stage for evaluating the country's progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. It would also provide scopes for assessing the future financing needs, requirements or issues the country may come across in executing these global goals while identifying the ways for addressing those needs or requirements.

BDF 2020 would also provide a platform for assessing the progress as well as the future development paths of the country's key priority areas like health, education, rural development, climate change, trade facilitation, private sector engagement etc. Such assessment is especially necessary in light of the country's ongoing socioeconomic transformation as well as the changing global dynamics. At the same time, the forum would also provide an opportunity for assessing various ways for leveraging the opportunities that may arise with country's eventual graduation while mitigating its potential challenges. Above all, BDF 2020 would chart the ways for sustaining and building on the gains that have been made over the last decade through ensuring a stronger and more inclusive partnership.

This year in the Forum of BDF, issues of 'Effective Partnership for implementing the 8th FYP Aiming towards Achieving SDGs' will be discussed in the keynote session. And in the Business Sessions, issues like Policy Support for Private Sector Engagement and Trade Facilitation, Innovative Financing for a Self-reliant Bangladesh, Partnership for Climate Change and its Financing, Rural Transformation: Creating Opportunities for All, Healthcare Services: Inclusive Delivery Options, And Quality Education for All will be highlighted in the Forum.

It can be hoped that a Joint Communique may be developed and a final and comprehensive outcome documents will be shared as the outcome of the Forum. This will outlay policy recommendations compiled from the discussions of the various sessions and thus the Forum of BDF 2020 will share a very significant role directly and indirectly in achieving the Sustainable Development of the Country.

The country has also made commendable strides in numerous fields, which has been aptly reflected by various socio-economic indicators. The average life expectancy is now over 72 years; the infant mortality has dropped to 24 per thousand and the maternal mortality rate has been

brought down to 1.72 per thousand. Compared to 40 percent in 2005, the poverty rate has come down to around 20 percent in 2019. Bangladesh has also made some visible breakthroughs in the education sector. Whereas, many developing countries are finding it difficult to achieve gender parity in education, the country has already achieved parity at primary and secondary levels. According to official figures, girls account for 51 percent of the total at primary level, while their proportion at the secondary level is 54 percent. This trend has been sustained for quite a few years, and the participation rate of girls is also on the rise at the college and university levels. All these successes have led to much acclaim worldwide and a global recognition for Bangladesh as a ‘Role Model of Development’.

The decade of 2020s poses many challenges for the society and economy of Bangladesh. The development goals and strategies for the first half of the decade will be articulated through the 8th Five Year Plan this year. Successful realization of the SDG goals and targets is also very crucial for ensuring an inclusive and environmentally sustainable socio-economic growth. Besides, Bangladesh also needs to take preparation for tackling the side-effects of graduation from the LDC status, including synchronisation with new trade rules and regulations. There is also an urgent need to upgrade the country’s infrastructure, boost investment cum business climate, and bring about qualitative improvements in healthcare, education and human resources. Undertaking adaptive and mitigating measures to tackle the impacts of climate change also remains a major development challenge for the country. Forging and strengthening development partnerships with multilateral and bilateral stakeholders are therefore vital for carrying forward Bangladesh’s socio-economic advancements in a sustainable and inclusive manner.

The general objectives of BDF-2020 include evaluating Bangladesh’s progress in achieving SDGs, assessing the future financing cum resource gaps, development challenges and how to address those in a planned and systematic way. Key priority areas like education, health, rural development, climate challenges, trade facilitation, private sector growth etc. will have to be analysed in the light of domestic socioeconomic transformation and global trends. The specific objectives of BDF-2020 include gauging priority sectors and policies that are likely to have long-term strategic impact on Bangladesh’s advancement by taking into consideration the 8FYP, the SDGS and Vision-2041; recognizing and consolidating the involvement of stakeholders in the country’s development pursuits; and reaching agreement on steps and approaches to be adopted by the stakeholders for advancing the cause of Bangladesh’s development in the short and medium terms.

The BDF-2020 will hold a keynote session and six thematic business sessions on the socio-economic priorities of Bangladesh, the SDGs and the 8FYP. The keynote session will specifically dwell on effective partnerships for implementing the 8th Five Year Plan, which is also geared towards realizing the SDGs. The six business sessions will cover the following themes: policy support for private sector engagement and trade facilitation; innovative financing for a self-reliant Bangladesh; partnership for climate change and its financing; rural transformation by creating opportunities for all; healthcare services through inclusive delivery options; and ensuring quality education for all. It is expected that the relevant stakeholders will take follow-up actions based on policy recommendations emanating from these discussions.

23.01.2020

PID Feature

# Govt's Steps to Ensure Freedom of Media in Bangladesh

**Md. Saifullah**

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh guarantees freedom of thought and conscience and of speech as fundamental rights. The present democratic government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina firmly believes in freedom of press, as the fourth estate after executive, legislature and judiciary to run the state-craft. Article 39 of the Constitution of Bangladesh lays emphasis on the freedom of press and uninterrupted flow of information excepting issues relating to sovereignty and integrity of the state. Following the spirit of the constitution, the government provides all-out support to the media and thus upholds freedom of expression of opinion in the society.

The present government is firmly determined to uphold the freedom of press as envisaged in the Constitution of Bangladesh. Accordingly, the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina just after assuming office in 2009 enacted laws and rules on 'Right To Information'-RTI and instituted the Information Commission. The government officials are now bound to provide information to the newsmen within the time frame stipulated in the law which is playing a vital role in maintaining transparency and accountability in running the government. Following RTI, there are assigned officials at each and every office to provide information to media people and others as they need. The number of such officials at the public and private offices all over the country is 42,254. Under the law, 1,19,831 individuals were served with the information as per their demand across the country during July, 2009 to December, 2020. The law has been proved so useful that the Information Commission has to dispose 2218 cases relating to RTI out of 2315 accepted for hearing since its inception. Punitive actions have been taken in such 62 cases. Many government officials have been punished for their negligence or failure in co-operating the media people as per the RTI rules. The power of arresting journalists without court-warrant under the Special Power Act has been ceased. The journalists in the country are now working without any fear. Stringent measures have been taken against the incident of attacks on journalists and bloggers by the vested quarters and militants. Such attacks on media people have drastically come down due to the government's instant action of zero tolerance policy. The Press Council is working to resolve the disputes among the stakeholders of the media.

Newspaper owners can import tax free newsprint and other printing materials from abroad. On the other hand, they are bound by law to offer their journalists a salary package recommended by the wage board constituted by the representatives from the government, journalists and the owners. The government has already announced the 9th Wage Board Award. The government is also contemplating to include journalists, camera-persons and other related support service people in the private TV channels in the wage board. Imposing ban on airing commercial ads in the downlinked foreign satellite TV channels and control on the digital content uploaded in the social media greatly help the flourishing of the local media. Income from the government ads and supplements also help them.

Digital Bangladesh Programme being implemented by the government has reinforced media manifolds. County-wide availability of electricity, high speed internet, mobile phones, computers, laptops, television channels contribute to bring information at the finger touch of the people. The present democratic government is providing policy support by framing various laws and regulations. Right to Information Act 2009, Cable Television Network Operation and Licensing Regulation 2010, Private FM Radio Centre Installation and

Operation Policy 2010, National Broadcasting Policy 2014, Bangladesh Journalists Welfare Trust Law 2014, and National Online Mass Media Policy 2017(amended in 2020) are very much mention-worthy. To make media more pro-people, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting following National Online Mass Media Policy so far approved 85 online news portals and online news version of 92 established newspapers of the country. Registration of the approved online news services is going on under the supervision of Press Information Department. More online news media would be approved soon. The government has a plan to develop a new agency named 'National Broadcasting Authority' which would ultimately oversee the online media.

With the support of the media friendly policy of the government, a huge number of newspapers are being published in the country. According to information received from the Department of Films and Publications, there are over 700 media enlisted newspapers in the country. Out of all these, 560 are media enlisted dailies of which 255 are being published from the capital Dhaka. Electronic media have got a great jump with the Digital Bangladesh Programme. Along with state run TV and Radio, the government has provided license to 45 private TV channels, 27 FM radio and 31 community radio stations. As per official data, 31 TV channels, 22 FM and 17 community radio stations are now in transmission and

the rest are taking preparation for launching. Launching Bangabandhu Satellite-1 has strengthened media arena in the country. All the TV channels of the country are being transmitted through Bangabandhu Satellite-1 at subsidized rate. The plan of the government to launch Bangabandhu Satellite-2 would surely contribute more in this regard.

Both the print and electronic media enjoy full freedom in running their activities. Live programmes like talk-show, discussion, debate in the TV channels are very popular in the country. Noted personalities, politicians, intellectuals, educationists, journalists and even grass-root people regularly participate in these live events and freely express their opinion. They most often go on rampant criticism of the government or of its activities without any censor. The government never interferes such free expression of opinion and views. Other electronic media even newspapers taking the advantage of 360 degree strategy also telecast such live participatory programmes. The freedom of expression of opinion and also free flow of information have been strengthened with the widespread use of social media and mobile phones. Presently, about 17 crore mobile SIM and 11 crore internet users in the country show an immense potentiality of the non-traditional ‘neo-media’ in the society. Considering its importance, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has decided to create its new wing named ‘Social Media Wing.’

In true sense, an era of free electronic media began in the country during the first tenure of Sheikh Hasina’s government (1996—2021) with the approval of the private TV channels for the first time. The installation of the first private TV channel of the country, Ekushey TV, is mention-worthy. The subsequent BNP-Jamat Government following their anti-mass media policy stopped the transmission of the TV channel.

The Awami League government has taken necessary steps for grooming up equipped manpower for the ever expanding media arena of the country. The government arranges training for the journalists across the country to raise their professional standard. The government has also taken steps to create the scope of higher education on journalism at various public and private universities. A huge number of university graduates are now being engaged in the ever expanding media world. The government established Bangladesh Cinema and Television Institute in 2014 for developing skilled media people for the potential electronic media. The government spent 20 crore taka for the expansion of Press Institute of Bangladesh and National Institute of Mass Communication who also provide training to the media people. To extend necessary support to media, the 16-storied ‘Tothyo Bhaban’-- Information Building costing

104 crore 12 lac taka has been built. The government has taken a project to develop Information Complex at the district level. And lastly, Press Information Department, a government agency directly working with the journalists in providing them with professional support, is going to open its offices at Sylhet, Barishal, Mymensingh and Rangpur Divisions.

The journalists suffer from job insecurity in their own working environment in the both print and electronic media which is also a threat to the freedom of press. To ensure their job security, the formulation of the Mass Media Workers Act is at the final stage. Formation of the Bangladesh Journalists Welfare Trust is another epoch-making media friendly step of the present government. The trust running with the contribution from the government has given 17 crore 87 lac taka to 5263 insolvent and poverty-stricken media workers since 2011-12. In two Phases, 3 crore 66 lac taka was provided to the media people distressed due to the spread of coronavirus with 10,000 taka for an individual. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina donated 10 crore taka to the Bangladesh Journalists Welfare Trust for the coronavirus victim media people for the fiscal 2020-21. The distribution of the fund is going on.

***Writer : Former Vice Chairman, Bangladesh Film Censor Board***

***30.05.2021***

***PID Feature***

# Bangabandhu's Historic 7 March Speech A Masterpiece by a Poet of Politics

Taslima Akter



A good number of addresses delivered by the veteran world leaders are now included in the academic courses at various levels. However, the address by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman before over 1million people at the Racecourse Maidan (now Suhrawardy Udyan) on 7 March 1971 is a unique one in many considerations. The Speech of the thunderous voice of Bangabandhu inspiring millions of Bangalees to lay down their lives for liberating the motherland has a special position to the learners specially to those with literature background. Another important dimension of this historic speech is the effective application of all the skills of communication of public address making it a textbook example for the communicators specially for the teachers. Universally all the leaders are good teachers or communicators. This uniqueness has been more pronounced in case of Bangabandhu. When any teacher listens to Bangabandhu's 7 March Speech, he or she would surely get some ingredients to absorb at least in terms of communication proficiency.

No legend could give such speech like that of Bangabandhu that has been able to stir the world to that extent. If anyone clicks online, a huge stockpile of literature on the speech would be visible within second. Journals, compilations, articles, features, research findings, press reports, seminars, symposiums etc on threadbare analysis of the historic speech are coming out every day. The American news magazine the 'Newsweek'

in its 5 April, 1971 issue published a special article on Bangabandhu's 7 March Speech in which the Great Leader was described as a 'Poet of Politics'.

As a student of literature, I think, a political leader is some sort of poet, who leads the followers to a world of dream. Bangabandhu had also been such a poet who was able to hypnotize his people with a dream of having an independent country breaking the shackles of subjugation of thousands of years. However, a poet may or may not think of realizing his or her dream. From a poetic position, the speciality of Bangabandhu is, he had been able to materialize what he dreamt and what he made his people dream. So many leaders in this land dreamt of independence and carried out long struggle accordingly but failed in the long run. But Bangabandhu was unique in achieving thousands years old long cherished goal. And that is why, Bangabandhu is the greatest Bangalee of the all times, the founder of the Bangalee nation based state, the architect of the Independent Bangladesh and the father of the Nation of Bangladesh. Bangladesh and Bangabandhu are inseparable. As long as Bangladesh remains, the name of Bangabandhu will also remain. The conspiracy to undermine Bangabandhu in the chronicles of Bangladesh has never been successful, rather the conspirators themselves were thrown in the garbage of the history.



Photo : Bangabandhu delivering the historic 7 March Speech at the then Racecourse Maidan

The 7 March Speech, the ground breaking event towards achieving the most coveted freedom, has tagged Bangabandhu as the Poet of Politics. Bangabandhu delivered a huge number of speeches throughout his

political life. He was an extra-ordinary orator. Each and every speech delivered by him was a poem. The best masterpiece was the 7 March Speech. His political acumen, charismatic leadership, undisputed command, sagacious thinking, profound wisdom, tower personality, invincible courage, indomitable spirit, sky high confidence --- everything was in climax while he was delivering the speech. The freedom fighters during the War of Liberation used to listen to this speech to boost up their moral strength. Even after half a century, whenever we listen to this iconic speech, we feel a stirring in our blood. The wording of this speech is tied in a miracle way that, not a single unit can be changed. No one would be able to put pen on it changing even a word. Whenever we read it, we find it as an extra-ordinarily inspiring poem, not prose.

Along with an exceptional skill of making a prompt public address, Bangabandhu was also blessed with an enormous potentiality of writing. We see his journalistic zeal in the then Daily Ittehad and other newspapers and periodicals. We also witness Bangabandhu's distinctive creative writing spirit in his autobiography "Oshomapto Attojiboni" (Unfinished Memoirs), "Karagarer Rojnamcha" (Prison Daily Life Diary) (daily life diary written Bangabandhu during his about 13 years imprisoned life) and "Amar Dekha Naya Chin" (The New China as I Saw), "Pakistani intelligence report on Father of the Nation" and "Smritikatha" (memoirs) (compilation yet to complete).

As a part of the under-graduate and graduate course syllabuses under the Department of English, the students have to go through detailed analysis of the 7 March Speech of Bangabandhu. The students are also to study some other world renowned speeches. These include 'The Gettysburg Address' by U. S. President Abraham Lincoln, 'I have a Dream' by American Civil Rights Activist Martin Luther King Jr. and 'A Long Walk To Freedom' (autobiography and addresses) by South African Anti-apartheid Leader Nelson Mandela. Some other epoch-making addresses come as references. Addresses by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Soviet Leader Vladimir Lenin, Founding Father of the People's Republic of China Mao Tse-tung, Vietnamese Leader Ho Chi Minh, India's Non-violent Resistance Movement Leader Mahatma Gandhi and the First Indian Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru are notable.

Among all the world renowned addresses, the 7 March Speech of Bangabandhu is the most acclaimed one. This is the best speech of all the times. The speciality of this speech is; Bangabandhu delivered it fully extempore without having any script or talking points or even hints. The script of the speech now available was prepared from its audio-tape.

Moreover, Bangabandhu delivered the speech in a life and death critical moment and none of the world leaders mentioned above delivered speech in such a nerve-breaking pressure. Abraham Lincoln's highest rated the Gettysburg Address was a three minute long with less than 275 words. The well scripted speech was delivered at a ceremony recalling the soldiers killed in the 'Battle of Gettysburg'. And British Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivered his outstanding speech "Never was so much owed by so many to so few" commemorating the pilots of the Royal Air Force killed in the 'Battle of Britain'.

Bangabandhu was under extreme pressure from the then ongoing movement activists to declare independence without any delay. There was also a reasonable ground for such declaration after dilemma of the Pakistani Junta to hand over power to the people's representative following the election results. On the other hand, the Pakistani Junta was out to quell such one sided declaration branding it as a separatist movement. Bangabandhu as a leader of the majority people of Pakistan had never been ready to take the blame. International support and sympathy needed for the Independence Struggle was also in his consideration. So, he had to be very thoughtful and strategic in selecting his words in the speech. How strategic he was! In the address, calling upon the countrymen to get ready to face the enemy in the imminent war with whatever the weapon they had, Bangabandhu finally proclaimed, "The struggle this time is a struggle for freedom--the struggle this time is a struggle for emancipation." He, in the speech, detailed various necessary preparation and gave all out directives for the war. However, about in the middle of the address, Bangabandhu gave four conditions like withdrawal of Martial Law, sending back army personnel to barracks, investigation into the killing of the Bangalees and transferring power to the representatives of the people – for thinking of to join the Assembly Session called on 25 March. Declaring strongest combat against the Pakistani Army, Bangabandhu commanded, "We will strive them (Pakistani soldiers) into submission. We will submerge them in water" Just immediately Bangabandhu pointing to the Pakistani soldiers in a soft voice said, "You are my brothers, stay in your barracks and no harm will come to you." In the address, Bangabandhu declared the continuation of the ongoing general strike in the government and semi-government offices and courts, but exempted rickshaws, launches, etc considering the suffering of the poor people. Thus we get both the soft hearted humanitarian and hardliner uncompromising Bangabandhu in his legendary address. The conversation style although the address made it more attractive. The total history of exploitation and repression on the Bangalees by the Pakistani rulers came in his brief but profound and deep speech. Bangabandhu, through his thunderous voice kept the huge audience surging like waves

of the most rough ocean. His unwavering call touched the heart of every Bangalee and mobilized the whole nation to get prepared for the ultimate sacrifice.

Bangabandhu's 7 March Speech is also a matter of interest from the language communication point of view. From our language learning knowledge, we know, a person can deliver highest 3 words in a second for an understandable communication. This should be one third for a huge crowd using hundreds of loud speakers of microphone as had been on the Racecourse Ground on that day. The total number of words in the about 19 minute long age winning speech was 1107. The seasoned orator Bangabandhu maintaining that standard communication rule pronounced on an average 58 to 60 words in every minute. There was no repetition of word or redundancy in the speech. However, repetition of some words in one or two spots were just to give emphasis or reinforce the inner meaning. The inborn and inbuilt leader Bangabandhu, through his robust voice, articulation, body language, gesture and posture was so communicative that every individual of the huge gathering had been able to follow what he meant. While delivering speech, the way he was moving towards every direction to draw attention of audience of all sections of the gathering was also unique. The use of local dialect in the speech made it more effective. Bangabandhu developed this unparallel oratory skill over the years. He delivered most of his speeches instantly, without any prior preparation. He was gifted with an extra-ordinary intellect of drafting speech just seeing the audience from dais. His memory was so sharp that he could recall any one he had talked to anywhere, any time even long before. He had always been with an extra-ordinary talent to read the mind of the people. And that is why, he was the leader of the mass people of the whole country.

The 7 March Speech of Bangabandhu was inscribed as a documentary heritage in the Memory of the World International Register of UNESCO on 30 October, 2017. Earlier, the members of the International Advisory Committee of the UNESCO during its meeting from 24 to 27 October, 2017 in Paris thoroughly reviewed the 7 March Speech that had created a nation state. They had greatly been amazed seeing how a very tall statured leader through his fiery words kept a human sea of a mammoth rally up roaring with slogans all the time. UNESCO in its declaration said, the message imbued in the speech is still relevant and inspiring today as it calls for more inclusive and democratic societies in which the political, economic and cultural aspirations of all groups are fulfilled.

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PID Feature

# You Cannot Suppress Us Anymore

**Zafar Wajed**

Standing amid a sea of people numbering millions on a huge ground below the open sky, he had urged the 75 million Bangalis to join the struggle for independence and freedom. Responding to that call, the Bangalis had filed to the battlefield for rescuing the country. Seventy million souls were awakened by that call; they materialised the golden dream of independence by shedding blood. The Seventh March of 1971 arrived in the lives of Bangalis as a message for new revelation in life. And treading that path, they brought about a liberated motherland by spilling fresh blood from their bosom. Overall, the objective of 7 March speech was the independence of Bangladesh. There might have been slight variations in the wordings of the address, but the meaning was one and the same – independence; struggle for freedom. That speech motivated the Bangali nation anew. A new vitality was generated among the Bangalis. History says, the relevance of the Seventh March Address shall last forever. Despite the fulfilment of national hopes and aspirations, this address will live on as an ‘institution’. ‘The struggle this time is for independence’ – it was not merely an inspirational speech, it was something more.

The speech that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered fifty-one years ago at Ramna Racecourse on 7 March 1971 is now a symbol of the Bangalis. That symbol of the nation and its continued existence shall invigorate over the ages not only the people of Bangla, but also citizens of the world. This address is now a part of the global heritage. It has been translated into 50 languages across the globe. The new generation of Bangalis become emotional when they listen to that speech; it has been incorporated as a world heritage by UNESCO for justifiable reasons. It can be comprehended through research, discussion and review of this address how extensive and far-reaching the historical significance of a political speech can be. The researchers have said that the importance of this address is multidimensional, eternal; it was fully successful in creating a history of independence. According to historians, the 7 March Speech was a declaration in advance for independence; it became the incentive and provided the direction for the liberation war. As a consequence, the speech became an inseparable part of the great liberation war.

That spontaneous address ultimately became an irrevocable and paramount document of the liberation war. It did not remain confined to

merely being an inspiration for the people of this country during 1971 liberation war, it continues to inspire the repressed people across the globe in their independence struggles and liberation wars. At the same time, it makes important contributions to comprehending the courage, patriotism, resolute leadership and attractive voice of the founder of the state of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Not only in crafting the history of independence of this nation in 1971, it shall play a historic role till eternity in nation-building, history-creation and reorganization. That a speech could tremendously motivate a nation for joining the liberation war was a rare event in world history. The speech that inspired and taught the Bangali nation the core ideals of independence generated a fresh narrative for the whole world. And this speech showed the people of Bangla how to wage an indomitable war against the enemy. It showed the way forward and how to accomplish that. Those directives were present in that vital speech of Bangabandhu by showing historical trends. It can be easily gauged from its translation into half a century languages of the world, how important and significant that speech was.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had delivered the most influential address of his whole political career on 7 March. Without declaring independence directly, he made people understand clearly that the Bangalis should remain prepared for dedicating themselves to the struggle for independence and freedom. Consequently, the path was kept open in essence for achieving independence through discussions, even if not through legal means. History clearly shows that the history of the Bangalis reached a critical juncture on 1 March 1971 when the military ruler of Pakistani junta Yahya Khan suspended the opening session of the parliament. The Bangalis started to secede from the state structure named Pakistan from that day. And the control of East Pakistan or Bangladesh was apparently thrust into the hands of Bangabandhu and Awami League through continuous struggle and non-cooperation movement starting from 1 March. It became obvious during that tumultuous month of March that the Bangalis were a heroic nation and they could not be subdued twenty-three years after the emergence of Pakistan.

The Seventh of March arrived in the lives of Bangalis with the message of a nation's emergence. That perspective was created after the landslide victory of the Awami League in the election of 1970. Humiliated, repressed, exploited and tortured – the Bangali nation wanted the people whom they elected to form the government and frame the constitution after assembling at parliamentary session. But this aspiration was crushed under the boot on March 1. When the March 3 session of parliament was

suspended, the Bangalis understood that the electoral mandate given by the Bangali population – who were the majority in Pakistan – was being trampled under feet. The whole of Bangla was in flames, getting ignited by a spark of fire after this single announcement by Yahya. The fire spread in all directions like wildfire. The Bangalis descended onto the roads by leaving their homes and burst out in anger. The whole of Bangla was filled with processions. On their path to freedom, the Bangalis could realize that the Pakistanis were determined to nullify their electoral victory as well as their spirit of self-determination. By breaking free from their age-old shackles, the Bangalis did not bow down to this injustice and insult.

The war began from March 3 of 1971. By then, the Pakistani army were standing face to face before the fury of Bangalis. There were 120 deaths and 335 injuries in Chattogram alone on March 3 and 4. On 4 March, 6 civilians were killed and 22 wounded in Khulna. On 5 March, 4 people were killed and 25 injured when Pakistanis opened fire in Tongi. Two were killed in Khulna and one in Rajshahi on the same day. There were frontal clashes between the army and civilians throughout the country during observance of strike on March 6. On the same day, 7 persons were killed and 30 wounded by bullets when 341 prisoners tried to flee from the central jail of Dhaka. All these were indications of an imminent war. And Sheikh Mujib was anxiously pressing for trial of the killings of these martyrs. He also said in his 7 March speech that he could not join the parliamentary session by trampling on the blood of the martyrs.

There were revolts after revolts across Bangladesh after the announcement of the suspension of parliamentary session on March 1. At that juncture, an independent ethos was waking up by breaking the 23 year-old chains. On March 2, a spontaneous strike was observed at the call of Bangabandhu. And in accordance with his directive, the map-carrying flag of independent Bangladesh was hoisted at a gathering of students on the same day at Arts Faculty compound of Dhaka University. On March 3, Bangabandhu informed at a public meeting held at Paltan Maidan that he would announce a future action-plan on March 7 if the Yahya Government did not accept his demands by March 6. The 75 million people of Bangladesh became energised after this announcement. And the Pakistani rulers as well as international community including the USA became anxious to know what announcement Bangabandhu would make on March 7. Even then, the Pakistani rulers did not soften their stand. Yahya only announced a fresh date of 25 March for holding the parliamentary session. Bangladesh was turbulent from the first day of the fiery month of March in the wake of this announcement by Yahya and the controversial statements of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

At the same time, the arrivals of soldiers in the cantonments were rising. The situation became explosive due to the warlike posturing of the army and the tendency to kill unarmed Bangalis at different places. In this backdrop, the previously announced public meeting of Bangabandhu became very important and highly significant. And the rebel Bangla gradually became very agitated. On March 4, the word Dhaka was erased from Radio Pakistan Dhaka. The new name was Dhaka Radio Station. The television station was named as Dhaka Television Centre. Various motivational programmes like songs, plays were broadcast from these mass media in support of independence. Bent on following Sheikh Mujib's directives word by word and imbued with a steely resolve to achieve freedom for the Bangali nation, the Bangalis were motivated to receive training at various places in order to become armed. The non-cooperation movement had imbibed the Bangalis with an irrepressible and thunder-like courage. Songs of the masses were floating across the country. The language of protest and the fire of resistance were burning in the minds of the Bangalis. After much bloodshed, the battlefields were beckoning the Bangalis. The seventy million souls had become one and were engrossed in annihilating the enemy.

The 7 March Address was not a sudden event. Before this speech, Bangabandhu had gradually energised the nation in favour of independence through speeches delivered at various gatherings in January and February. He pointed finger to the conspiracies of the Pakistani military rulers and specified what should be done to nullify that. Sensing that the Pakistani ruling coterie was hatching a deep conspiracy inside, Bangabandhu had said after uttering words of oath following the laying of floral wreath at the Shaheed Minar on 21 February, "None had the power in the world to suppress the Bangalis. Those who seek to enslave Bangalis by making them beggars and foiling their demand for self-determination, attainment of their objective shall be thwarted at any cost".

He had even uttered in a grief-stricken voice, "We have hard days ahead. I may not remain present among you. Man is mortal. I do not know when I shall be able to stand before you again. Therefore, I am telling you and the people of Bangla today, prepare for the ultimate sacrifices. People of Bangla should not be exploited. They should not be humiliated, insulted. ..The dissatisfied souls of the brave martyrs are moving from door to door – Bangalis, please do not become cowards. Elicit your rights even by making supreme sacrifices. I urge the people of Bangla – get ready, we shall certainly realize our rights". He started the process of making people resolute immediately after the election of 1970. At the inauguration ceremony of the memorial meeting on the language

movement held at Bangla Academy premises on 15 February 1971, the chief guest Sheikh Mujib said, “The Bangali nation has become united for the first time now. The Bangalis are today united for realizing their rights”.

Bangabandhu had depended on the masses, the very people whom he had prepared bit by bit for the movement to achieve self-determination and independence. He had also said during a press conference on 29 January 1971, Bangladesh had been ruled and exploited during the previous 23 years. Traditional conspiracies were being hatched for sustaining that situation. But it was reassuring that the countrymen were fully conscious and awake, and they had the capacity to crush the vested interests by shattering the net of conspiracies. During a reception organized by the singers and musicians of East Bengal on 24 January, Bangabandhu said, “Although the people have won initially, but the apprehension of danger has not yet gone away. The path is still uncertain. ..Please remember, our danger has not passed away. The objective has not yet been achieved. The need may arise for extreme struggles. Get prepared for that day”. Before that, he provided directions and uttered many important things during his long speech at the 23rd anniversary programme of the Chhatra League on 4 January. He said, “The Awami League shall fight to the last for ensuring the fruits of independence for the people”. It becomes clear after reviewing the speeches and statements prior to 7 March that he had articulated the conclusion of those addresses through his 7 March speech.

Those who came to the public meeting of Racecourse Maidan on 7 March 1971 by pasting the mantra of independence on their chest for listening to the great leader’s declaration, they knew that freedom would not come without a hard fight. When the Pakistani planes flew over the meeting, some of them even threw sticks thinking that enemy soldiers were present. A woman named Monwara Bibi sang, “I feel like dying, there is no end to my sadness, my heart rends as the golden Bangla becomes a graveyard”.

Questions were posed even at the start of 1972 on why Bangabandhu had not made direct declaration of independence on 7 March. Bangabandhu himself answered this question during his interview with David Frost. Bangabandhu wanted the Pakistanis to make the first move. He was a politically astute and farsighted politician. He therefore did not make any direct declaration of independence, although he spoke about independence indirectly. If he had done that, the Pakistanis could have proved to the world that Sheikh Mujib was a secessionist. He did not provide that opportunity to the Pakistanis.

And the Pakistanis were already prepared with fighter jets and tanks. If there was a direct declaration of independence, then they would have pounced on the gathering of hundreds of thousands of people like Hyenas. David Frost had asked, “Did you want to declare Bangladesh’s independence at Racecourse ground on 7 March?” In reply Bangabandhu said, “I knew what was going to happen. I declared at the meeting that it was the right moment for independence and freedom”. Frost again asked him, “If you had uttered ‘I am today declaring the independence of Bangladesh’ on that day, then what would have happened?” In reply, Bangabandhu said, “I did not want to say that specifically on that day. Because, they would have got the opportunity to tell the world that Sheikh Mujibur Rahmand had declared independence, therefore there was no option for us other than to attack. I wanted that they should strike first, my people were ready to tackle that assault”.

History says, Bangladesh effectively became independent on 5 March. On that day, the reins of Bangladesh came into the hands of Bangabandhu. Whatever Yahya did after that, the people of Bangladesh viewed that as an aggression against a sovereign land. The independence of Bangladesh was not the result of any secessionist movement. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had himself said about 7 March during his address delivered at Suhrawardy Udyan on 26 March 1975, “I made a call to the people of Bangla. I prepared them on 7 March. When I saw that the attack had started, I made a call that very moment – no more, confront them. The occupiers must be evicted from the soil of Bangla. You cannot suppress the 75 million people of Bangladesh”.

‘Independence’ and ‘Freedom’ were two favourite words of Bangabandhu. Therefore, he uttered in the middle of his 7 March address, ‘The struggle this time is for freedom. The struggle this time is for independence’. The nation has achieved independence, the struggle for achieving freedom continues. In the words of Bangabandhu, ‘nobody can suppress’ the Bangalis in this struggle.

*The writer is Director General, Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB), and winner of Ekushey Padak for journalism*

*Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed*

# Noise Pollution And Its Probable Impacts On Public Health In Dhaka City

**Dr. Sharmeen Jahan**

Noise is a “loud and unpleasant” sound that exceeds the acceptable level and creates Annoyance. With urbanization and increasing human activities, the problem of noise pollution in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, is worsening day by day. Along with water and air pollution, noise pollution has also become a hazard to the quality of life. Noise pollution is a subtle killer. Even a relatively low noise level affects human health adversely. In Dhaka, the average sound level is 80-110dB in prime areas such as Farmgate, Karwan Bazar, Shahbagh, Gabtoli, and Mohakhali Bus Terminal, says the study report. This is almost twice the maximum noise level that can be tolerated by humans – 60dB – without suffering a gradual loss of hearing, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

UN Environment Program (UNEP, 2022) report declared Dhaka the world’s noisiest city. Against the permissible limits of 55 decibels as set by the WHO, the noise levels in Dhaka were found to be at least twice that, at 110-132 decibels. 75% of noise pollution in Dhaka originates from vehicles. According to the WHO, around 5% of the world’s population is facing several kinds of health hazards due to complexities related to noise pollution. Around 11.7% of the population in Bangladesh has lost their hearing due to noise pollution, says the Department of Environment (DoE) study, which was conducted in order to check noise pollution, the government has introduced Bangladesh Sound Pollution (Control) Rules, 2006. According to the guidelines, exceeding the maximum noise level in a certain area is a punishable offense.

Also, using a stone breaker machine in a residential area is prohibited, and a permit from the DoE is required to organize any social or religious event that could generate loud noise in a residential area. However, the rules have never been properly implemented anywhere in the country, the study has found. The department of environment occasionally monitors traffic and industrial noise pollution. The major sources of noise pollution in urban areas are traffic and loud horns. The DoE found that in Dhaka, 500-1,000 vehicles honk at the same time when stuck in traffic. Other causes of noise pollution include loud music during social, political, and religious programs, construction work, and factory noise.

It may cause hypertension, disrupt sleep, and/or hinder cognitive development in children. The effects of excessive noise could be so

severe that either there is a permanent loss of hearing and memory or a psychiatric disorder. Besides, World Health Organization identified many other adverse effects of long exposure to moderate-level noise or sudden exposure to excessive noise. Due to the environmentalist 17th International Congress on Sound and Vibration (ICSV17), Cairo, Egypt, 18-22 July 2010 movements in different countries, some remarkable initiatives have been taken to check the noise level. For example, the USA has established sites where human-caused noise pollution is not tolerated. Similarly, the European Union prepared 'noise maps' of big cities. The laws of the Netherlands do not permit the construction of houses in areas where 24-hour average noise levels exceed 50dB. In Great Britain and India, the Noise Act empowers the local authorities to confiscate noisy equipment and take legal action against people who create excessive noise at night. Several countries are also investing in newer technology, which can curtail noise pollution. It is reported that most of the dwellers of Dhaka city are not aware of the ill effects of noise pollution. They even do not consider noise a pollutant and take it as a part of routine life. The environmentalist movements here are also not much serious about noise pollution. However, it has been recognized as a pollutant in some recent studies. In Bangladesh, a set of guidelines for regulation and control of noise and for establishing "silent zones" around educational and medical institutions has been formulated in Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, of 1995. Bangladesh High Court gave a ruling on 27 March 2002 banning hydraulic and all sorts of excessively noisy horns in vehicles. In a gazette notification in 2006, the ministry of environment and forest affairs empowered the authorities to confiscate noisy equipment or vehicle and fine people guilty of causing noise pollution.

#### **Maximum noise levels in different areas**

<b>Areas</b>	<b>Maximum noise level (dB)</b>
Sensitive areas (Education, Hospital, Mosque)	40-50
Residential Zones	45-55
Mixed areas	60-70
Commercial areas	65-70
Industrial areas	70-75

*Source: Bangladesh Noise Pollution (Control) Rules, 2006.*

### Measured Noise Levels in Some Sensitive Areas of Dhaka

Location ( Inside the facility)	Measured noise level average (dB)	
	Morning	Afternoon
Eden Mohila College	69	67
Udayan School	57	55
Willes Little Flower School and College	66	69
Motijheel Ideal School and College	77	72
Curzon Hall ( Dhaka University)	87	77
Dhaka medical college hospital	89	91
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mojib Medical College Hospital	90	95
Ever care Hospital	55	53
Ramna park	57	54

Source: Field survey, 2022

According to table, it can be observed that the sensitive areas have a maximum sound level of 95 dB in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mojib Medical College Hospital followed by Dhaka medical college hospital, Curzon Hall ( Dhaka University), Motijheel Ideal School and College, Willes Little Flower School and College, Eden Mohila College, Udayan School, Ever care Hospital, Ramna park. A significantly high amount can cause health issues such as hearing and sleeping problems, and cardiovascular problems/ heart problems.

### Effects of noise pollution on Traffic police, Driver

Sex	Traffic police			Driver		
	Below 30	30-40	40-50	Below 30	30-40	40-50
Age, Yrs.						
Respondent (total) 297	25	73	52	35	77	35
Loses of attention and performance	10 (40%)	23 (32%)	7 (13%)	14 (40%)	23 (29%)	8 (23%)
Insomnia. Stress-related illness	3 (12%)	11 (15%)	15 (29%)	7 (20%)	11 (14%)	5 (14%)
High blood pressure	2 (8%)	12 (16%)	10 (19%)	3 (8%)	16 (21%)	7 (20%)
Hearing and Sleeping disturbance	6 (24%)	17 (23%)	7 (13%)	8 (23%)	19 (25%)	8 (23%)

Sex	Traffic police			Driver		
	Annoyance and Aggression	3 (12%)	7 (10%)	8 (16%)	2 (6%)	6 (8%)
Cardiovascular problems/ Heart problems	1(4%)	3 (4%)	5 (10%)	1 (3%)	2 (3%)	4 (12%)

*Source: Field survey, 2022*

The World Health Organization (WHO) has documented seven categories of adverse health effects of noise pollution on humans which are: hearing loss, interference in speech communication, sleep disturbance, cardiovascular and physiological effects, mental health disturbance, impaired task performance, negative social behavior and, annoyance. These are grouped into 6 groups as shown in these Tables. The respondents are asked to choose the kind of problem he/she is facing due to noise pollution. The identified most dominant problems caused by noise pollution are loss of attention and performance in study or job and bad temper/annoyance, hearing, and sleeping disturbance. Both are, in fact, interrelated. It is difficult for a disturbed mind to concentrate on a job and perform properly.

Significantly, among the Traffic police, Drivers interviewed, almost all of both said that hearing loss, interference in speech communication, sleep disturbance, mental health disturbance, negative social behavior and annoyance. They face a family crisis. About 9% of traffic police are at risk of permanent hearing loss, while 20% are suffering from temporary hearing problems due to acute noise pollution. About 10 % of drivers are at risk of permanent hearing loss, 17% are suffering from temporary hearing problems, 7% high blood pressure due to acute noise

The survey indicates that the noise pollution level is perceived to be high all day long and the principal source of noise pollution is vehicle horns. It also reveals that noise results in reduced efficiency and causes annoyance or bad temper, interference in speech communication, sleeplessness, etc. Nowadays people are becoming more aware of noise pollution's bad impacts and the significance of noise pollution control. However, this much awareness is not enough to make them proactive in taking steps to abate the problem.

### **Recommendations**

\* Make a conscious effort, and/or instruct your drivers, to honk as little as possible. \*Work with others in your neighborhood (home/ office) to control noise pollution. Post a sign banning honking, and ask those who work outside to help enforce it. If a special source of noise is present-

such as a shop selling music, or a brick-breaking machine –approach the owner as a group, and demand that the noise be reduced. \*Ban industrial activity in urban areas. This would have a double benefit: reduce both noise and air pollution.\*Visit neighborhood schools, and give the teachers and students leaflets about noise pollution and the need to reduce it.\*Work with media, or personally write a letter or article, about noise pollution. Stress the damages it causes, the need to reduce it through our own actions, and the importance of having strong noise pollution laws, to make Dhaka a more livable city.\*Try to get a local camera or cable TV station to air ads for free or with minimal cost, on the importance of action to reduce noise pollution.

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*PID Feature*

# To Ensure Public Access to Information

**Dr. Iman Ali**

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh recognizes freedom of thought conscience and speech as one of the fundamental rights of citizens and the right to information is an integral part of it. All power of the Republic belong to the people, and it is necessary to ensure right to information for the empowerment of the people. If the right to information of the people is ensured, the transparency and accountability of all public, autonomous and statutory organisations and of other private institutions constituted or run by government or foreign financing shall increase, corruption the same shall decrease and good governance of the same shall be established. There is a saying 'information is an integral driving force of our daily life'. There is no area left where there is an option to deny importance of this information

Now we will try to find out what is information. The Right to Information Act 2009 says about information, "information includes any memo, book, design, map, contract, data, log book, order, notification, document, sample, letter, report, accounts, project proposal, photograph, audio, video, drawing, painting, film, any instrument done through electronic process, machine readable record, and any other documentary material regardless of its physical form or characteristics, and any copy thereof in relation to the constitution, structure and official activities of any authority.

What is Right to Information and why it is needed? The right to information is generally known as the right to information which is helpful in attaining the political, economic and social rights of common people, the lack of which creates obstacles in attaining these rights, hinders of the citizen's participation in the national decision - making process. The field of rights to information is created primarily due to various legal and illegal measures to withhold information. The Right to Information Act is people- friendly law. This law ensures that the government is accountable to the people. Information shall not be withheld under any pretext or the provision of all information except the information mentioned in section 7 of the Act shall be mandatory.

Under the Act, the Government officers can give information freely, as the Act has given them courage to provide information. Every authority has appointed designated officers at most levels of government structures. Authorities are now proactive to set up information desks, displaying

citizens' charter, duty rosters, informing about allocation. Simultaneously, demand side community people can now have the courage to ask for information and make the authority accountable if they are not happy with their performances and can challenge authority if they are deprived from basic services. This is such an Act that has created a platform through which people from all walks of life and communities can now access their desired and necessary information, which are favorable for them. However it is important to note that the key factor of the Right to Information Act is to promote and lead to the good governance of the country. There is a close link between Right to Information and Good governance. Good governance is the vehicle for sustainable development. Right to information is related to indicators of good governance. Ensuring people's security, citizen's participation in national decision-making, best use of people's property for the development of the country. Ensuring the basic rights of citizens, transparency and accountability in governance. Ensuring right to information has a positive impact on good governance.

Some NGOs are adding their utmost efforts for individual incentive of accessing information by using Right to Information Act. Section 6 of the RTI Act ensures that every authority should publish and publicize all information related to any executed or proposed activities and decisions in such a manner which can easily be accessible to the citizens. In 2017 the Information Commission introduced Online RTI Application and Tracking System which received much appreciation from different stakeholders.

The Information Commission has been playing an important role in ensuring the people's right to information. Even at the beginning of the Corona crisis the Commission adopted virtual hearing process. At that time, no party had to appear before the Commission in person.

The countries of the world known by people as corruption free countries are oriented towards human welfare. RTI Act can play an important role to ensuring the rights of the most backward and deprived people in the society. Through the implementation of the RTI Act, it will be possible to make Bangladesh a welfare state by making people aware.

***Writer : Educationist***

***PID Feature***

# **Matarbari Deep Sea Port: New Horizon For Maritime Economy**

**A H M Masum Billah**

The government is constructing a deep-sea port at sea island Matarbari, Maheshkhali, in Cox's Bazar district. Traditionally, this district is well-known for tourism. After this port is built, Cox's Bazar will also be famous for its fast- shipping facilities. It will open the doors to new possibilities for the country's maritime economy. This is due to the fact that large ships can transport large quantities of goods at one time in deep seaports. As a result, it takes less time and reduces the cost of transporting goods.

Global demand for shipping by seaways has increased in recent decades. This scenario has also been reflected in the Chittagong Sea Port where the amount of container handling has also increased rapidly due to the increase in seaborne imports and exports. In 2021-22 Chittagong port handled around 32.55 lakh TEUs of containers. The experts opine that in continuation of the current container handling growth, by 2041 the amount of annual container handling in the country is likely to reach 140 lakh TEUs (Twenty-foot Equivalent Units). The current seaports of the country will not be able to handle this large number of containers and ships. With this context, the Government has taken up the project for developing Matarbari deep sea port to reduce excess pressure on Chittagong port and enhance the handling capacity of a large number of ships and containers. Through the implementation of the project, this seaport is expected to handle 11 lakh TEUs containers by 2026, which will increase to 42 lakh by 2041.

Not only the deep-sea port, to maximize the maritime and other economic benefits of Matarbari the government has undertaken 36 other projects. The development projects include setting up coal-based power plants, special economic zones, coal (coal) jetties, Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) terminals, a pipeline for fuel transportation, a petroleum complex etc. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in November last year instructed to set an authority to coordinate all development activities in Matarbari. Several development partners are involved in these projects. Matarbari will certainly emerge as the commercial hub of the country and South Asia region in the future.

Chittagong and Mongla sea ports are not deep-sea ports. As a result, deep draft ships cannot enter the jetties of these ports. To ensure the jetty facility for deep vessels, the 'Matarbari Port Development' project has been adopted as a priority one. At the same time, it has been included in the fast-track projects of the government.

The deep seaport at Matarbari will offer a minimum of 16 meters of a draft whereas existing seaports can only accommodate ships with a 9-meter draft. As a result, the ships carrying 8000 containers will be able to enter the port under construction at Matarbari.

The construction work of the first phase of the port commenced on 16 November 2020. The project includes the construction of a 460-meter-long container jetty, a 300-meter-long multipurpose jetty and making a 14.3 km-long channel. The depth of the channel will be 16 meters and the width will be 350 meters. Apart from this, the Chittagong Port Authority will extend the North Breakwater dam by 397 meters and procure two key-gantry cranes, one multipurpose gantry crane, six rubber-tyred gantry cranes and three tugboats. The project is scheduled to be completed by December 2026.

Matarbari port will have well-planned connectivity of road, rail and river. Thus, imported and exported products will reach their destinations easily and at a low cost. The port will facilitate the import of coal, liquid natural gas (LNG), crude oil and oil-like products, cement, clinker, fertilizer, food, steel and scrap iron, etc.

The Chittagong Port Authority is implementing the construction of the Matarbari port with support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Ministry of Shipping at the cost of 17 thousand 777 crores taka. Out of this, JICA's loan amounts to 12 thousand 892 crores, the Bangladesh government's allocation is 2 thousand 671 crores and Chittagong Port Authority provides 2 thousand 213 crores from its fund. For the implementation of the project, Cox's Bazar district administration has provided Chittagong Port Authority with 283.27 acres of land.

According to a JICA survey report, Matarbari and Kashima in Japan have almost the same topography. Therefore, like the Kashima Seaport, Matarbari port can be connected to the sea by constructing a channel. To prevent silt from accumulating in the channel, a breakwater dam will be constructed to prevent the flow of water.

However, although built on the model of Kashima Seaport, Matarbari port will be two and a half times bigger than Kashima's. Undoubtedly, it will bring revolutionary changes in the overall economy of the country.

This new deep seaport will be a milestone on the way to becoming a developed country. It will accelerate our journey to join the list of developed and prosperous countries.

Due to its geographical advantages and deep-sea port capacity, the port will become one of the major centres of trade and commerce in South Asia. So, our neighbouring countries may take advantage of this port. Besides, Matarbari deep seaport, 36 development projects including power plants, special economic zones, etc. are being implemented there by different bodies of the Govt. There will be a huge amount of foreign investment at Matarbari in the days ahead and the business and trade of the country will gain new momentum. The massive development works at Matarbari will strongly contribute to the transformation of the economic scenario of the country and a developed country by 2041.

*Writer: Senior Information Officer*

PID Feature

# **Bangabandhu Erected the National Identity of Bangalis**

**Nasiruddin Chowdhury**

Today is 26 March, the great Independence Day. The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had declared the independence of Bangladesh on this day in 1971. He urged the Bangali nation in that declaration to join the independence struggle and expel the invading and occupying Pakistani forces by shedding the last drop of blood. When Bangabandhu was writing the declaration of independence while remaining seated at his Dhanmondi road-32 residence, the Pakistani commandos had encircled the house for arresting him. He was then a fearless man bereft of mundane apprehensions. He had prepared himself to sacrifice his own life for the sake of the nation. He was fully ready to embrace death. After seeing off all his colleagues, he was waiting alone at road-32. When some colleagues asked him to go into hiding, he replied, “I have given you independence, please go and preserve that”.

Bangabandhu knew that the Pakistani hyenas would even look for his corpse by digging the soil of Bangladesh if they did not find him. After preparing the declaration of independence, he faced the challenge of passing it to the leaders and workers waiting outside as well as his countrymen. While dwelling on how to publicise this declaration, he remembered his colleague of Chattogram – the local Awami League leader and Member of Parliament Zahur Ahmad Chowdhury; he could be given the onerous responsibility of publicising this declaration. Bangabandhu then handed over the declaration to one of his closest neighbours after writing this great mantra of Bangalis’ freedom on a slip of paper. Bangabandhu gave Zahur Ahmad Chowdhury’s telephone number to him and requested him to send the message to that number. All Bangalis were then eagerly waiting to receive Bangabandhu’s directives. That neighbour –then passed on Bangabandhu’s message by making a telephone call to Zahur Ahmad Chowdhury’s residence. A dramatic and terribly fateful night commenced after that. Following a lull for some time, the beastly forces of Pakistan exploded with a massive roar to begin the worst ever, most horrendous and brutal mission of genocide; it was as if the whole sky fell on the Bangali nation!

## **Background of the Declaration of Independence**

It was the 26th of March 1971, the final hours of our long struggle for

independence; on that day, the greatest Bangali of a thousand years, the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh. He had spoken about independence at the public meeting on racecourse ground on 7 March. But he did not directly say on that day: 'Bangladesh is an independent country from today'. He said this in the early hours of 26 March after the midnight of 25 March.

Bangabandhu's historic declaration of independence was in English, which is now preserved in the family library of Zahur Ahmad Chowdhury. It was as follows:

“Pak Army suddenly attacked E.P.R. Base at Pilkhana, Rajarbag Police Line and killing citizens; street battles are going on in every street of Dacca. Chittagong. I appeal to the Nations of the World for help. Our freedom-fighters are gallantly fighting with the enemies to free the motherland. I appeal and order you all in the name of Almighty Allah to fight to the last drop of blood to liberate the country. Ask E.P.R., Bengal Regiment and Ansar to stand by you and to fight. No compromise; Victory is ours. Drive out the last enemy from the holy soil of motherland. Convey this message to all Awami League leaders, workers and other patriots and lover of freedom. May Allah bless you.”

“Joy Bangla”

Sk. Mujibur Rahman

26 March 1971

That neighbour made the telephone call (no. 80785) at Zahur Ahmad Chowdhury's residence to pass on the message. As Zahur Ahmad Chowdhury was outside home, his wife Dr. Nurunnahar Zahur wrote it down.

When Nurunnahar Zahur informed Zahur Ahmad Chowdhury about the message after writing it down, he prepared its cyclostyle copies very swiftly and made arrangement for its distribution all over the town through the Awami League and Chhatra League workers. Rickshaws, vans and taxies were used for this publicity. As directed by her husband, Nurunnahar Zahur sent the message to Salimpur Wireless Station in Sitakunda thana for overseas transmission of the message via wireless. The then Assistant Engineer of Salimpur International Maritime Wireless Station in Sitakunda thana AKSMA Hakim took appropriate decision and action with the help of his colleagues to transmit Bangabandhu's declaration of independence abroad.

The Awami League leaders of Chattogram decided to use radio for the purpose of publicising Bangabandhu's declaration of independence.

Alongside printing and distributing cyclostyle copies of Bangabandhu's declaration of independence, they pressed into service the transmission centre of Chattogram Radio Station located at Chandgaon area of the town. Later, it became the publicity organ of the liberation war by adopting the name 'Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra' (Radio Station of Independent Bangla).

The general secretary of Chattogram district Awami League M A Hannan read out Bangabandhu's declaration of independence in his own voice from the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra. On being inspired and requested by the Chattogram Awami League leaders, Major Ziaur Rahman of Eighth East Bengal Regiment also read out the declaration of independence on behalf of Bangabandhu on 27 March, which was re-broadcast on 29 March.

A message on Bangabandhu's declaration of independence also reached Salimpur Wireless (VHF) station of Chattogram from Mogbazar VHF Wireless Station at 4 or 5 am dawn. This message then reached almost all the police stations and EPR posts through the wireless network of EPR, and its cyclostyle copies were distributed. News about Bangabandhu's declaration of independence, secession of the eastern wing of Pakistan and the civil war were publicised through foreign newspapers and radios.

If the background of the declaration of independence is analysed, then finding linkages with events like the establishment of Chhatra League in 1948, founding of the Awami League in 1949, victory of the Jukta-Front in 1954 etc. is not difficult. The linkage with the non-cooperation movement was direct.

The whole of Bangladesh exploded in anger when President Yahya Khan of Pakistan indefinitely postponed the session of Pakistan National Assembly scheduled to be held from 9 am in the morning of 3 March 1971 through an announcement made at 1.05 am noon on 1 March 1971. There was suspended animation, although the Awami League did not have any pre-set programs on the day; but the heat spread across the country. This unexpected announcement by Yahya added fuel to the fire. The whole nation descended on the streets in protest.

The government servants came out from the secretariat and other public offices; the banks, insurance companies and other business establishments also became empty. A cricket match was in progress at the stadium. Immediately after hearing the radio announcement of Yahya, the spectators poured out of the stadium in groups. There was no need to ask anybody. People came out spontaneously from their homes; they joined processions with whatever they could find nearby including

sticks. Those processions became longer and longer, and ultimately stretched across the whole of Bangladesh territory.

Bangladesh was not yet free then; but that thunderous eruption transformed East Pakistan into Bangladesh in a matter of single day. In fact, the liberation war of the Bangalis had started on that very day. Slogans like “Address of yours and mine, Padma-Meghna-Jamuna”, “The last word of all – independence of Bangladesh”, “Valiant Bangali take up arms – make Bangladesh free”, “Your leader, my leader – Sheikh Mujib, Sheikh Mujib” reverberated all around through the spontaneous voices of hundreds of thousands of people. The whole of Bangladesh became filled with processions. All strata of men and women including children, youths, the middle-aged and the aged left their homes to participate in processions on the roads imbued with the spirit of that fiery and unprecedented mass awakening.

After the overwhelming victory of the Awami League in the election of 1970, Yahya Khan was maintaining his silence. In this backdrop, he summoned the parliamentary session in Dhaka on 13 February when the Awami League became vocal about it. But Zulfikar Ali Bhutto issued a statement on 15 February asserting that his Pakistan People’s Party would not join the session in Dhaka as there was no possibility of reaching any understanding on the question of 6-points. But PPP would not object if a pledge was made on amending the 6-points. In this backdrop, the Baloch leader Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti said on 17 February, “The decision taken by Mr. Bhutto to foil the session is aimed at separating the two parts of Pakistan”. Bangabandhu responded on 24 February; he said, “An open conspiracy is being hatched to foil the electoral triumph of the people. The masses should remain alert and awake, and take preparations against this conspiracy”. Meanwhile, the Council Muslim League and the Pro-Quayum Muslim League also declined to come to Dhaka by speaking in the same tone as the PPP. On 27 February, 27 MNAs from West Pakistan announced that they would attend the Dhaka session.

They then started to arrive in Dhaka for joining the March 3 session. But the political atmosphere became hot for the first time after election when Yahya suspended the assembly session through a statement issued at 1.05 pm noon on March 1. The scenario changed immediately after Yahya suspended the assembly session without holding any discussion with the majority party. The whole of Bangladesh became inflamed.

The greatest and best achievement of the non-cooperation movement was the pronouncement made by the thunderous voice of Bangabandhu – ‘Freedom’. The thousand year-old cherished dream of the Bangalis was set free through the roar of that single word. Independence was no

more a 'dream' then, rather it became a reality; not banned alphabets, but an independent country. The rights of the people for freedom, and the sovereignty of the Bangali nation over their country were acknowledged. The invading Pakistani forces then swooped on the heartland of Bangladesh on the dark night of 25 March for recapturing the state. The question of independence appeared before the Bangali nation after the call made by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman during his address at Racecourse Maidan of Dhaka on 7 March 1971. The non-cooperation movement was continuing even before that at his call.

Pakistan died and Bangladesh was born through the non-cooperation movement; the non-violent non-cooperation movement assumed a fuller shape later by getting transformed into an armed war of liberation. In fact, the non-cooperation movement was a preface to the liberation war; this period can be termed as the period for mental and organizational preparation for the liberation war. The Bangalis became a 'military race' by getting burnt in the fire of this movement. Military training centres were set up all over the country through the initiatives of the Awami League cum its Action Council, and the Chhatra League cum its Students' Action Council. The dearth of weapons was met through wooden dummy rifles while imparting training to the civilian population. How effective that training was in the battlefield was not the issue; what was more important was the reflection of the craving for waging a war in order to materialise the aspiration for independence. These trainings did not take place in secret; rather the parades and war-cries of students-youths-workers-peasants around the clock at innumerable training centres built in towns-villages, open-fields, post-harvest marshlands became familiar scenes in Bangla. We do not know whether this kind of all-pervasive enthusiasm for military training as seen among the Bangalis could be observed in the life of any other nation.

This huge zeal for military training can be termed as a preparation for people's war. At that time, military preparation among general masses for the liberation war was undertaken as a part of the movement led by the Awami League and Chhatra League in accordance with the directive of Bangabandhu. Former military officers and jawans as well as Ansar Force members took up the responsibility of imparting military training to the general public after ending their retired life. They joined the war when it started.

Alongside this people-centric preparation, the Bangali soldiers working in the military and pseudo-military forces of Pakistan were also contacted centrally and locally, so that they could join the liberation war of their motherland when needed by revolting against the Pakistani forces.

## **Pakistani Barbarism and Genocide**

The seeds of destruction were in vogue in the very creation of Pakistan. There was slackness in the knot that was tied based on religion alone despite divergences in geography, language and culture. Tearing up of that knot in 1971 was therefore inevitable. There is no exact count of how many precious lives were lost prematurely, how many women lost their honour or became widow, how many parents lost their offspring, or how many children lost their parents. The entire subcontinent was flooded with blood during the creation of Pakistan in 1947. Three million Bangalis had to sacrifice their lives for establishing Bangladesh by breaking free from the clutches of Pakistan in 1971. The waters of Padma, Meghna, Jamuna, Buriganga, Shitalakshya, Teesta, Brahmaputra, Surma, Kushiara, Arial Khan, Kirtankhola, Modhumati, Gomati, Karnaphuli, Shankha, Matamuhuri and Bankkhali became red with blood. The honour of two lakh mothers and sisters was lost. Millions of people had to take shelter in the territory of friendly neighbouring country India after becoming refugees.

The Pakistani president Yahya Khan accorded his brutal, barbaric troops the licence to kill and destroy, and incited them to attack the innocent and unarmed civilians of Bangladesh who were either asleep or taking preparation for that purpose. The Bangali soldiers and police working in military and militia forces were also not spared from their brutality. They smashed to ground the citadel of the movement at Dhaka University, the Rajarbag Police Lines and the EPR Headquarters in Pilkhana at the very outset by attacking with tanks, canons, rockets, recoilless rifles and machineguns. For executing Yahya's blueprint of committing genocide styled 'Operation Searchlight', the Pakistani soldiers continued their limitless cruelty, brutal killings of people, bestial tortures, reckless plundering and destructions throughout the nine months. They turned the Golden Bangladesh into a burial ground by burning slums, hostels, towns, ports and villages. The devastations and havocs wrought by the Pakistani troops have no parallel in the history of mankind in terms of their enormity and hideousness.

The Bangalis finally went for waging an all-out war against the invading forces. The parliamentarians from the Awami League went to India for constituting a government-in-exile. Syed Nazrul Islam and Tajuddin Ahmed were appointed the Acting President and Prime Minister respectively of the government. They formulated the proclamation of independence that ultimately took the shape of the constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. An independent and sovereign Bangladesh finally emerged through the surrender of the Pakistani forces

at Suhrawardy Udyan of Dhaka on 16 December after a nine-month long war of liberation.

There was no country called Bangladesh in the past. The Bangalis were also not a nation at any stage. The scope for the emergence of a nation-state comprising the Bangali population – who lived within the geographic boundary of East Pakistan by sharing the same language, culture and heritage – was created when East Bengal was incorporated in the new state of Pakistan during the partition of India in 1947. Bangabandhu was the first person to comprehend that possibility.

Before coming to Dhaka from Kolkata, Bangabandhu sat at a secret meeting with his trusted colleagues at Sirajuddaulah Hall of Islamia College and said: This may not be the real independence; we shall have to start a new struggle on the soil of Dhaka for achieving real independence. He engaged himself in that struggle from the very first day he arrived in Dhaka. At first the establishment of Chhatra League (1948); then the strike of class four employees of Dhaka University, language movement (first phase), Tangail by-election, founding of Awami Muslim League (1949), second phase of language movement, Jukta-front election (1954), presentation of 6-points (1966), Agartala Case (1968), election of 1970, and lastly the non-cooperation movement.

Bangali nationalism erupted with a roar when a countrywide movement was built up based on the 6-points. The Bangali nation woke with the spirit of self-determination after observing the discriminations and step-motherly attitude of Pakistani rulers; when they were not satisfied even with the demand for autonomy, then the imperative for independence became visible. The Bangali nation assumed the shape of a single national entity through their demand for independence in March 1971. Bangabandhu was that Pied-Piper of Hamelin who brought them to the streets. Bangabandhu was also the first to pronounce the word 'Bangladesh' during a memorial meeting held at Bangla Academy in 1969. Therefore, Bangabandhu was that mythical king who was the proponent and source of Bangali Nationalism, Independence and the Independent State of Bangladesh.

***Writer : Journalist***

***Translation: Helal Uddin Ahmed***

***PID Feature***

# **Bangladesh Government is Committed to Free and Fair Election**

**Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen, MP**

Over the last 52 years, the relationship between USA and Bangladesh has been great and during the last year, both President Biden and Secretary Blinken wanted to strengthen it further. No wonder, the US administration has been sending one after another teams to Bangladesh to explore ways of strengthening our relationship. Currently Bangladesh and USA is working together in collaboration and partnership on a number of multifaceted issues such as Climate Change, Rohingya issue, Women's empowerment, UN peacekeeping, Health and Labor issues, Trade and Investment, Energy and renewable energy sector, economic development, people's empowerment, education, skill training and Digital innovations. In addition, USA is engaged with us to help improve the democratic process, rule of law, freedom of press and media, etc.

Bangladesh is also trying to establish rule of law, that is no one is above law and it abrogated the infamous "indemnity laws." In order to strengthen 'rule of law' and good governance, it requested the US government to handover fugitive killer of our Father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Mr. Rashed Chowdhury to Bangladesh. Since USA is committed to rule law, hopefully they will prove their commitment by deporting him to Bangladesh soon.

Unfortunately, there is a wrong perception among few US lawmakers and Officials regarding Bangladesh. They believe that Bangladesh is moving towards the Chinese debt-trap as a few Chinese Companies are engaged in constructing a few mega projects in Bangladesh. Since the Chinese Companies were lowest in price in submitting international public tenders, they got the job. For example, they got the job of constructing the railway line in the Padma Bridge. Bangladesh government is constructing it with its own money, but engaged a Chinese company to do the job, same with the Bangabandhu Tunnel in Chittagong. Unfortunately, nobody mentions about Japan, South Korea or India who are also involved in constructing projects in Bangladesh. Japan is constructing the 3rd terminal of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport and also the Dhaka Metro Rail Project plus constructing a few dedicated highways and byways. Till to-date, as a single country, Bangladesh borrowed maximum from Japan and JICA. No other country can match them. Bangladesh is very prudent

in borrowing. Its total foreign debt to GDP is around 13.78%, and as per IMF, if a country's foreign borrowing is over 55%, then there is a possibility of debt-trap. Bangladesh borrowed maximum loans from the international agencies like the WB, ADB, IMF etc. amounting to 61%. It borrowed 17% from a single country and it is Japan. In fact, the total loans received from China are around 4.0 billion, which is less than 1% of its GDP. Till today American investment in Bangladesh is the highest and it is around 21%, followed by Japan, South Korea, UK, Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysia. Recently many more countries showed interest to investment in Bangladesh and among them Saudi Arabia, UAE, India, Qatar, Australia and China are major ones.

A few countries namely the USA, India, Japan, Australia and EU countries are trying to contain the rise and spread of China. Since Bangladesh is very strategically located, in between China and India, and it maintain a very balanced and non-aligned foreign policy. The cardinal principle of its foreign policy is “friendship to all, malice towards none”, and it was laid down by the Father of the nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Recently Bangladesh announced its Indo-Pacific Outlook in which it proposes to have open, free, secure, inclusive, and rules-based navigation for all. Both India and Japan have similar views. Bangladesh maintains absolute religious harmony and tolerance, and it has thousands of media, and its press is very vibrant and free. The population size of Bangladesh is half of that of USA, yet it has almost equal number of dailies in Bangladesh, and its media and social media are hyper-active. Bangladesh is the most densely populated country in the world (3,300 people per square miles) and is a Least Developed (LDC) country yet its labor force maintains a comfortable life, much better visa-a-vis that of other LDCs.

When the UN Special Rapporteur reported that few NGOs of Bangladesh claimed that 76 people kidnapped or enforced disappeared in Bangladesh, the government took it seriously. On investigation it was found that out of these 76 persons, 8 are living in their own homes with their families, two are Indian nationals living in their own country in India, and 28 are absconding from justice. Unfortunately, police don't have any complaints from the rest of 38 persons. Neither the Civil Society nor the Human Rights organizations could provide any information about the rest.

When their contacts of the family members were asked to submit more detail information, they failed to do it. Instead, they claimed that the government is harassing them. Therefore, police have stopped going to

their homes, and instead, it sent them letters with a request to submit more details about their whereabouts at the time of missing.

It is reported that many may leave their homes or family due to family squabbles, few may be for financial and work pressures, joblessness, etc. Bangladesh government does not like to see any of its citizens to be missing or killed extra judicially. It is unfortunate that each year almost a thousand people are killed in USA without due process of law by security personnel in their line of duty. No one in the USA would like to see gun violence in schools, malls, clubs, parks or open spaces, yet it happens. Similarly, no one in Bangladesh wants to see any of its citizens getting kidnapped, yet it happens. Whenever such happens, government immediately takes all necessary corrective measures.

The current government of Sheikh Hasina is the crusader of democracy, human rights and justice. In 1971, when majority party of Pakistan was denied to form the government, the Bangladeshi people sacrificed 3million lives to uphold democracy, justice, and Human Rights.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation suffered imprisonment intermittently over 14 years to establish democracy, people's right to vote, right to food and shelter, and he spearheaded a campaign against corruption, extremism, and terrorism. Following the footsteps of her father, Sheikh Hasina has also suffered pains to establish right to vote, right to food and shelter, right to freedom of Press and media. In fact, she is currently the only head of the government in the world who suffered so much to establish democracy, Human Rights and Justice. She lost her entire family, her father, her mother, her 3 brothers, including a 10-year old brother; totaling 18 members were assassinated mercilessly in a military quo in 1975. It is Sheikh Hasina who endured prison, harassment and deprivation to restore multiparty democracy in Bangladesh. Democracy is in her blood and in the vein of her party, the largest party of Bangladesh – the Bangladesh Awami League (AL). The AL is always voted to power with people's mandate, not through backdoor like few other parties of Bangladesh. She is committed to a "free and fair" election and in order to have a free and fair election, she has instituted (1) biometric photo voter ID (to avoid fake votes), (2) transparent ballot boxes so that no one can stuff ballots before the voting starts, and (3) she established a very powerful, and highly independent Bangladesh Election Commission. It has broad power and it is responsible to conduct elections without favor or fear. They have the authority to suspend, transfer or terminate any officials both civilian and security if they find any interference or partisanship. More importantly, they have the power to cancel election in any center if they are convinced that fraud

or muscle power is used and vote rigging occurred. Over the last 15 years, AL conducted thousands of elections and except a microscopic few, by and large, elections were free and fair. Only recently, Mayoral elections in five cities were conducted and each of these elections was free, fair and even non-violent. The Election Commission deserves thanks for a splendid job. However, it is a fact that even if the Election Commission, or the government of Bangladesh are committed for a free, fair, and non-violent election, without sincere commitment of all political parties, one cannot guarantee a non-violent election in Bangladesh. If the opposition parties like the BNP or the Jamaat boycott the election, or burn down the election centers, ransack the ballot boxes, create roadblocks to voters, burn-down public and private buses, trains, boats, vehicles as they did in 2014 and 2018, you cannot expect a non-violent election.

Therefore, it is imperative that all parties must participate and sincerely commit for a free, fair and non-violent election.

***Writer : Former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh***

***PID Feature***

# Freedom of the Press and People's Welfare

**Md. Sazedul Islam**

The government took prompt action by arresting the offenders responsible for the death of a madrasah girl in Feni recently in an arson attack. Appropriate and stern steps were also taken by the government following the murder of a man in Barguna in an attack in front of his wife.

The two sensational incidents got the national attention, which may be attributed to the role of the mass media. Media is playing its role to facilitate determining the state policy and important decision of the state through reflecting public opinion.

Mass media print, broadcast television and radio and online media is free to work and this has been assured by the Constitution.

Among the two types of media in the country, State-run and private. The number of state-run media is limited but the private media is on rise. However, all the media houses publish and broadcast reports and news about multifarious issues and thus bring any such important issues into light.

The country has hundreds of newspapers (both English and Bangla). In Bangladesh, there are radio stations—Bangladesh Betar (state-owned) and privately-owned radios popularly known as FM Radio. Also there are some community radios. Alongside, state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV), about 30 private TV channels are on operation. Besides, there are news agencies, online news portals, online-based radio and TV in the country are on rise.

With the advancement of technology, internet-based news portals are also available in Bangladesh and they are doing very well. Updated news and information is available on those websites, People get to know the news and events instantly from those.

The state is marching towards development and media plays an undeniable role here. It is undeniable that media plays a great role in the development of democracy in Bangladesh.

Media keeps the citizens informed of the national and international activities. It is the press, which brings programmes, policies and activities of the government to the notice of the people locally and internationally

Similarly, it keeps the Government aware of the people's problems, difficulties, hopes and aspirations. Thus, the press plays a dual role. It serves as a bridge between Government and the people. Media serves as an intermediary between individuals and government. Media informs about people's needs and thus acts as a shield against any crises and situations of extreme deprivation. Media holds government accountable and makes their actions more transparent. Along with other indicators of good governance, media creates a business-enabling environment, a climate conducive to more effective public affairs management, and so forth.

The people of Bangladesh are now exposed to a wide array of information and it is influencing all strata of life in all the regions of the country. Free flow of information has not only empowered women and the underprivileged; it has also generated enthusiasm among all the segments of the populace to take part in development activities.

In the age of communication technology and digital media, one thing that cannot be done is barring the flow of information and hindering people's access to information. This is the power of media, neo media and press in this century that bombards us every moment with huge amounts of information.

The media has evolved and become more active over the years with the help of technological innovation and access to information that has revolutionised the concept of freedom of expression. Free media constitutes the fourth pillar of democracy.

The media of Bangladesh got their freedom from the Supreme law of the land the Constitution of Bangladesh. Article 39 of our Constitution deals with freedom of thought, conscience and of speech for all and thus freedom of the press is a fundamental right of all citizens as guaranteed in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

The most important constituent of democracy is the existence of free and fearless press. In a democracy, the press must enjoy complete freedom and not be barred to any restriction. The voice of the press is the voice of the people.

The media will protect the democracy in the country. When the country's democracy was hampered in the past, the mass media helped overcome the crisis through reflecting public opinion. The very survival of democracy inevitably depends on the freedom of the press.

The press in a democratic Government must be free, frank and fearless. A free press always has a positive influence, whether be it on poverty,

on government or on violence and conflict issues. It is believed that the weaker the constraints on the press, the more developed a country will be.

By promoting freedom of the press, any country can provide itself with a powerful development tool. Development is a complex process in which the press can play a fundamental role by making individuals aware of their rights and of their freedoms, they should logically enjoy in a democratic society.

However, at the same time, the press must not fail to follow its code of conduct and misuse the freedom. While the press should enjoy freedom to perform its role effectively, it should not treat such freedom as a license to defame anybody. It should not publish any views or support any movement that violates our Constitution or is against the territorial integrity and unity of the country.

The press must enjoy freedom, but does it imply that the press will be beyond monitoring and governance? Of course not, especially when we witness mushrooming growth of online press and spread of fake news that can even influence state policies and adversely affect development initiatives.

Facebook came under heavy fire for not doing enough to stop the spreading of fake news. Credibility of the press came into question at different times.

Practice of objectivity and responsibility in the mass media should be increased in national interest.

Steps need to be taken to increase capacity of the journalists so that they perform their duties properly. Capacity building of journalists can make a big difference in making them knowledgeable of the importance of press freedom. Skill development for the journalists, working from remote areas and promoting sensible journalism and accuracy of information can also create a big makeshift towards ensuring press freedom. Positive programme for journalists on social crucial issues can make the journalist community aware of the importance of press freedom. Considered as the Fourth Estate, the mass media can play an important role in opening the third eye of society and the state.

It is hoped that the media, in national interest, would play its positive role in maintaining law and order as well as achieving the country's development goals.

# Dangerous Drug LSD

**Dr. Sabbir Harun**

LSD (Lysergic acid diethylamide) is a semi-synthetic hallucinogenic drug. It is manufactured from lysergic acid which is found in the ergot fungus that grows on ray and other grains and a non-organic chemical called diethylamide. LSD is also referred to as acid.

LSD is produced in crystalline form and then mixed with other inactive ingredients or diluted as a liquid for production in ingestible forms. It is colorless, odorless, water soluble and has a slightly bitter taste. LSD is most often taken orally. It is usually diluted with other materials. Solutions of LSD in water or alcohol are occasionally encountered. LSD is light sensitive in solution, but more stable in dosage units.

LSD produces tolerance, meaning the user needs greater doses of LSD to get the same high. Some users who take the drug repeatedly must take progressively higher doses to achieve the state of intoxication that they had previously achieved. This is an extremely dangerous practice, given the unpredictability of the drug.

While searching for medically useful ergot alkaloid derivatives at the Sandoz Laboratories in Basel, Switzerland, LSD was first synthesized by Albert Hofmann on 16 November, 1938. He discovered its hallucinogenic properties in 1943. Sandoz Laboratories introduced LSD as a psychiatric drug in 1947 and marketed LSD as a cure for schizophrenia, criminal behaviour, sexual perversions and alcoholism. It was listed as a schedule 1 controlled substance in the Conventions on Psychotropic substances, 1971 by UN.

LSD is so potent. A very small amount, equivalent to two grains of salt, is sufficient to produce the drug's effects. It is taken orally as capsules, pills, sugar cubes, chewing gum or liquid drops transferred to colorful blotter paper. Its doses tend to be in the microgram range. Recreational dosage averages between 25 to 80 micrograms. The physical effects of LSD are unpredictable from person to person. Usually, the first effects of the drug when taken by mouth are felt 30 to 45 minutes after taking it, peak at 2 to 4 hours and may last 12 hours or longer. Its effects, often called a 'trip' can be stimulating, pleasurable and mind-altering or it can lead to an unpleasant, acute and disturbing psychological effects are known as a 'bad trip'. A 'bad trip' is similar to psychosis and the person cannot escape from it. There may be extreme fear, paranoia a separation

from self and the person may believe that they are dying or in hell.

The experiences are lengthy with the effects of higher doses lasting for 6 to 12 hours and it may take 24 hours to return to a normal state. If a large amount of LSD is taken the following negative effects are more likely to happen paranoia, increased risk taking, psychosis. LSD may not be particularly physically addictive but that doesn't mean it isn't dangerous. The effects of LSD can last far beyond the initial. LSD can trigger a range of perceptual changes. Visual effects include brightened, vivid color, blurred vision, distorted shapes and colors of objects and faces and halos of light. Changes related to touch include shaking, pressure and lightheadedness. Mood changes can lead to a sense of euphoria, bliss, peacefulness, dreaminess and heightened awareness or despair, anxiety and confusion.

**Thinking:** Impact on thinking can lead to a distorted perception of time, either fast or slow accelerated thoughts, unusual insight and a sense of transcendence. Sensations may seem to 'cross over' giving the feeling of hearing colors and seeing sounds. These changes can be frightening and can cause panic. Some LSD users also experience severe, terrifying thoughts and feelings, fear of losing control, and fear of insanity or death.

There is no known cure for HPPD, but a number of medications have been used to manage HPPD symptoms. The following medications have shown varying levels of success in managing HPPD symptoms: This drug is used for treating anxiety disorder and seizures. Atypical antipsychotics drugs are typically used to treat schizophrenia, irritability from autism and bipolar disorder. Clonidine is often used for treating high blood pressure, cancer pain and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. This drug blocks or minimizes opioids substances that act on the nervous system similarly to morphine and is usually used to treat alcohol and opioid dependence.

Effective doses of LSD are often exceedingly small-on the order of millionths of a gram. Though the profound perceptual changes that LSD brings about may place the user at risk of indirect bodily harm or injury, in most cases of mild to moderate intake the long-term effects of LSD involve the brain and psyche rather than the body. An experience with LSD is referred to as a 'trip'. Acute, disturbing psychological effects are known as a 'bad trip'. These experiences are lengthy, with the effects of higher doses lasting for 6 to 12 hours, and it may take 24 hours to return to a normal state. Regularly LSD use can lead to long-term effects include: Flashback- Flashback which is known as hallucinogen persisting perception disorder (HPPD) can happen weeks, months or even years

after the drug was last taken. While some flashbacks may be amusing, colorful, and even pleasant, hallucinogen persisting perception disorder (HPPD) can be a dangerous and frightening condition. Individuals with hallucinogen persisting perception disorder experience intermittent or chronic flashbacks that cause distress or impairment in life and work.

Experimenting with LSD and other drugs is often considered to be a rite of passage among teenagers and young adults. Older adults may use LSD occasionally to experience its hallucinatory effects, to achieve a quasi-religious state of exaltation or to escape their own reality. But the unpredictable effects of LSD make the drug dangerous to anyone who takes it even on a recreational basis.

Remittance sent by expatriates is one of our key economic pillars. This sector is the largest contributor to the country's GDP after the apparel sector. Manpower Export provides employment to a large population as well as earning valuable foreign exchange. During the covid-19 pandemic our manpower export and remittance flow slowed down, but the world has overcome the situation. The export of manpower is returning to good days.

During covid-19 pandemic Bangladeshi workers sent a significant number of hard-earned remittances. As a result, the foreign currency reserve increased to 48 billion dollars, when the economy of many countries was severely affected by the epidemic. Even in the midst of corona pandemic, in the financial year 2020-21, remittances of 24.77 billion USD came to the country. Later, as the global economy slowed down, it fell to 21.03 billion USD in 2021. However, in 2021, Bangladesh ranked seventh in the world and third in South Asia in terms of receiving remittances. In the first two months of the 2022-23 fiscal, USD 4.13 billion was added to the reserves.

At present, the corona infection is under control globally. Hence, economic activities around the world have regained momentum. New demands for manpower are rising from many countries, including the Middle East. The government has been very active in exploiting this opportunity.

As a result, twice the target manpower has been sent abroad in the last financial year 2021-22. Almost 1 million workers were sent overseas in the last financial year, surpassing all previous records. Demand letters for workers are still coming from different countries. The Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) expresses hope that this trend may continue in the current financial year as well.

Govt. has taken diplomatic initiatives to send manpower to other countries outside existing markets to further exploit the demand for the

labour force. As a result, the Malaysian labour market has reopened for Bangladesh after a long period of closure. An agreement was signed between Bangladesh and Malaysia in December last year to send manpower. Under the agreement, Malaysia will hire 5 lakhs Bangladeshi workers in the next 5 years. Out of this, 2 lakhs will go in the first year.

According to the recently published World Bank's 'Migration and Development Brief remittance income may grow by 2 per cent in 2022. During the covid pandemic, the government gave a 2.5 per cent incentive to encourage expatriates to send money through legal channels. That incentive still continues.

At present, there are about 1 crore 25 lakh expatriate workers working in about 174 countries of the world. Middle East countries are the biggest market for manpower. Apart from Middle East countries, there are significant Bangladeshi workers in countries like Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Brunei, Japan, Italy, the USA, and the UK.

Although a significant number of Bangladeshis are being employed abroad every year, there are many challenges in this sector. Our manpower is mainly unskilled or low-skilled. The demand for unskilled manpower abroad is decreasing rapidly. Due to the massive changes in economic activities caused by the fourth industrial revolution, many countries are now not interested in hiring unskilled workers.

Due to a lack of skills, Bangladeshi workers are employed in low-paying jobs. In the era of the fourth industrial revolution, there is no substitute for skilled manpower in a technology-driven world. Unskilled workers may become unemployed due to failure to adapt to the fourth industrial revolution. To maintain the labour market emphasis should be placed on enhancing the technical skills of employees. Because, although the Middle East is one of the most important for Bangladesh, the labour market dynamics there may change in the future.

Other reasons for not getting well-paid jobs include lack of cultural awareness, poor communication and language skills, poor physical fitness, lack of knowledge about modern machinery, lack of professional attitude, and ignorance of or reluctance to follow hygiene and sanitation.

The government has paid special attention to the development of workers' skills. The government is working to ensure the necessary training to improve the skills of the manpower. For this purpose, the 8th Five-Year Plan has given special importance to creating trained and skilled workers through skill development for foreign employment. The plan prioritizes increasing the rate of migration from backward districts and ensuring the protection and rights of migrant workers.

Under this plan, the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment has adopted a project for building 40 technical training centres in 40 Upazilas and an Institute of Marine Technology in Chittagong. On June 28, 2022, Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated 24 new TTCs. Another 100 TTCs in 100 Upazilas are under process.

Besides, the government is working to enter the labour market of other countries by reducing dependence on the Middle East. Skilled and semi-skilled workers are being sent to countries like Poland, Romania, Seychelles, Bolivia, Japan, India, China, Thailand, Greece, Brunei etc. In these countries, there is a demand for workers in catering, nursing, the clothing industry, and caregiving. Japanese, Korean, English, Arabic and Chinese are taught for language training for skill development.

The government's diplomatic activities have created employment for millions of workers abroad in the last decade and a half. It has changed the fate of the workers and the rural economy. Remittance flow should be continued to strengthen the foundation of sustainable economic development of the country.

The government is making all efforts to search for a new labour market and reduce the wickedness of brokers in this sector. The government wants to improve the skills of the workers so that our workers can get the opportunity to work in a good environment and with a higher salary. Skilled workers in this country will play a strong role in strengthening the remittance flow and building a developed and prosperous Bangladesh in 2041.

***Writer: Physician***

***PID Feature***

# The Fourth Industrial Revolution And Our Actions

**Farhan Masuk**

Our world is changing at an incredible speed. Touch of change around the world. New technologies are constantly knocking at our doorstep. Goodbye is the old meditation idea. People of the world need to learn the skills to use the new technology. The pace of technological change is much faster than acquiring the skills to use the technology. As a result, a new challenge has appeared in front of the people of the world to keep pace with the technological change. We have to accept the development and spread of new technology whether we want it or not, otherwise we will fall behind in this world. Digital technology has been associated with excellence in today's world. We can easily imagine that in the coming decades, the fourth industrial revolution driven by technology will change the old structure in all areas of the world. By the year 2030, many of the current jobs will no longer exist. The type of creation is still unknown to us. Robotics ie Artificial Intelligence, Block Chain Technology, Internet of Things, Decentralized Consensus, Gene Engineering and other technologies will build the world in a new way. In addition, fifth generation wireless technology, 3D printing and emerging technologies in fully autonomous vehicles will be considered breakthrough eras.

The fourth industrial revolution is now a reality, there is no denying it. If we fail to meet the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution, the new industrial revolution will leave us behind. There are advantages for us in meeting the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution. Firstly, the implementation of Digital Bangladesh over the past thirteen years has strengthened the foundation of Digital Bangladesh. It has a direct impact on all sectors across the country. It has affected the daily life of people. People are used to one word. Our economy is booming, per capita income is increasing rapidly. In the current financial year, the per capita income has been provisionally calculated at 2 thousand 591 US dollars. The per capita income of more or less 03 crore people of Bangladesh is about 05 thousand US dollars.

The export revenue in the ICT sector is 1.3 billion USD annually. 750 million USD in annual revenue in the outsourcing sector. Bangladesh ranks second in the world in terms of online workforce. The number

of financing is about six and a half lakh. Direct employment in Hi-Tech Park is about 21 thousand. Schools have more than 58 thousand multimedia class rooms. Day by day it is increasing. The government is providing multimedia class rooms on a priority basis in all educational institutions of the country. We need to push our education sector to face the fourth industrial revolution. Hundred percent of people in the country have now come under electricity facilities. Power generation is being increased as per the plan. The government plans to transform itself into a wealthy country with a per capita income of US\$ 15,000 by 2041 as well as empowering people equally. In order to implement this plan, all the concerned parties have been explained their responsibilities. Everyone is trying to implement this plan. If this plan is implemented, the GDP of Bangladesh will be 6 trillion US dollars in 2041. Bangladesh ranks 93rd in terms of size and 8th in terms of population. It is not very easy to plan the development of such a populous country and implement it. However, our honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina undertook this difficult task 13 years ago. She had announced the roadmap for the development of the life and livelihood of the people of the country through the implementation of Digital Bangladesh. Since then, digital education has continuously expanded. Many developed countries of the world have not even thought about the launch of 'Five G'. However, 'Five G' has already been launched in Bangladesh. A third submarine cable is coming this year. The government is bringing broadband internet connectivity to people's doorsteps. Broadband Internet provides high speed data through which technology is expanding. Future world will be data dependent. In this continuation, the demand for broadband internet will continue to increase day by day. The optical fiber network is being delivered to the masses to build the eco system to meet the demand for data and the consumer is easily accepting it. The government has already launched the 'Ekdesh Ekrate' package to make broadband internet affordable and people-friendly. Artificial Intelligence is also known as Machine Intelligence. The best example of computer science is artificial intelligence. The four main functions of artificial intelligence are speech recognition, learning new things, planning and problem solving. Artificial intelligence is being used in smartphones to take beautiful selfies, provide customized services keeping in mind the customer's habits and needs, and provide various services by listening to the voice. etc.

Many institutions in Bangladesh are already running their operations with the help of artificial intelligence. City Bank jointly started micro loan disbursement program with bKash . The help of artificial intelligence has been taken in providing this loan. That is, if a bKash account holder

applies for a loan using the bKash app, City Bank will grant the loan automatically with the help of artificial intelligence. No human help is needed here. The loan is available as soon as the application is made. No collateral or documents are required. Bank has no loan processing fee. Loans are collected on monthly basis from bKash account balance. Interest rates are also affordable. Customers are getting this facility 365 days 24 hours. It is a groundbreaking activity in the banking sector. Also, the use of robots in garment factories has started long ago. Robotic technology is being used to assemble refrigerator compressors at the Walton factory. ICDDRB has launched a state-of-the-art artificial intelligence-based method of diagnosing diabetic retinopathy with tele-ophthalmology technology called 'CARA'.

Block chain technology is the most secure technology in the current world for data transfer and data storage. In this method, any work can be done by collecting different blocks in the form of a chain. It is a distributable database in which all the transaction information between the participating parties is in the form of document is saved. Each transaction can be verified again by the majority of the system. Once an information is in the system it remains permanently, it cannot be deleted. It works perfectly. Currently block chain is very popular and effective in network security and data transfer. It is being used in all activities, including financial transactions, to reduce corruption in the country and protect people's information. Bangladesh is already working on this technology. But it is in the early stages. It is playing a revolutionary role in the health sector. All medical records of people are stored through block chain and this information will help the doctors in providing medical services. This technical service is limited in private big hospitals in our country. In various countries of the world, including the United States and Malaysia, the help of artificial intelligence is taken as an aid in determining probation, bail, sentence and crime trends.

The fourth industrial revolution will have the greatest impact on the job market. As a result of automation, industrial factories will become machine dependent. On the one hand, unskilled and low-skilled workers in the traditional labor market will lose their jobs, on the other hand, a lot of employment will be created for the skilled labor force in the new generation labor market. In this knowledge-based industrial revolution, skilled human resources will be more valuable than natural resources. As a result of the fourth industrial revolution, instead of off-sharing, the process of re-sharing will progress. That is, all the production processes that were previously transferred to developing countries will be taken back to developed countries.

The fourth industrial revolution will move mankind forward by 100 years. Today's generation is more educated and aware than before. Our children and teenagers are driven towards technology from birth. Actually there is no scope to go beyond our technical know-how. The fourth industrial revolution with its endless possibilities is knocking at the doorstep of the people of the world. It is hoped that Bangladesh will be able to face this challenge positively and introduce itself to the world as a developed country.

*Writer: Software Engineer*

*PID Feature*

# Ensure Safe Food For All

**Professor Tamanna Sarkar**

One of the basic needs of human survival is food. Basically our existence depends on food. Generally, the foods that increase the body's growth, produce energy, prevent disease and replenish damage, i.e. nourish the body, are called food. Food is all the ingredients that are needed to keep the body healthy and functional by running the body's functions properly. Food safety is one or more steps taken to protect the health of the consumer by protecting food from various contaminants or hazards such as: physAnything that can contaminate food and is harmful to human health is called a food hazard. Therefore, food safety and nutrition is an important issue for us to build a healthy and strong nation. Food handlers have an important role to play in controlling food-related hazards.

Article 25(1) of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 states that everyone has the right to food. According to Article 15(a) and 18(1) of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the basic needs of food must be met for all citizens of the state. Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said in a conference organized by Bangladesh National Cooperative Union on June 3, 1972, "Every person in my country will get food, get shelter, get education, have a better life - this is my dream." In order to realize the dream of the father of the nation, according to the definition adopted at the World Food Summit in 1996, the Government of Bangladesh is committed to ensuring the ability of all citizens to obtain food necessary for active and healthy living at all times. In 2000, consolidation of the country's food security began with the formulation of a comprehensive food security policy for Bangladesh. The food system in Bangladesh has undergone major changes in the last decade, where rice and wheat are readily available to poor and disadvantaged families, increased food grain production and awareness programs on nutritious safe food.

Bangladesh has already achieved food security. But ensuring safe and nutritious food is now a new challenge. In order to meet this challenge, the Safe Food Act, 2013 has been enacted by the Hon'ble Prime Minister's unilateral and visionary decision to ensure the right to access to safe food for the protection of life and health of the people. Along with this, Bangladesh Safe Food Authority was established on February 2, 2015 to fulfill the purpose of the Act. The main task of the authority is to ensure the right to safe food by coordinating related activities in

food production, import, processing, storage, supply, marketing and sale process through proper practice of scientific methods. The main task of the authority is to ensure the right to safe food by coordinating related activities in food production, import, processing, storage, supply, marketing and sale process through proper practice of scientific methods. The authorities have already formulated several rules and regulations to complete their activities. The safety and nutritional quality of food depends largely on the preparation of food by skilled and careful hands. Food safety is a multidimensional issue. Therefore, everyone at the family level should have an idea about how to keep food safe at every stage of food purchase, preparation, cooking, serving and storage. It is very important for everyone to have a proper understanding of various food hazards and proper knowledge of their control measures.

Every day countless people are getting sick by eating contaminated food and many of them are getting seriously ill. Some remain diseased for life and are passed down through generations. Children, the elderly, pregnant and lactating women and those who are already ill for other reasons are the most affected by food borne diseases. The signs of unsafe food are the final stages of contamination, which can be understood by changing the color, smell, and texture of the food. The reason for food being unsafe is due to chemical and enzyme structural reasons, due to external moisture, light, heat, germs, oxygen etc. infection of microorganisms like bacteria, yeast, mold and virus that help decomposition, eggs and milk etc become unfit for consumption, from which Increases the risk of developing various types of food borne diseases.

Natural and our habitual and careless causes also make food unsafe. Contamination during the production and preparation stages can also make food unsafe. Food is generally unsafe in four ways: Physical – in the presence of dust, dirt, hair, stone particles and debris, etc., Chemical – in the presence of excessive amounts of chemicals hazardous to human health , Biological – bacteria, viruses , resulting from the presence of fungi and other microbes; And allergens – due to the presence of certain substances such as gluten, lactose etc.

Perishable items such as milk, eggs, fish, meat or other frozen foods should be bought last when shopping, otherwise there is a risk of food spoilage. After buying food suitable for keeping in the refrigerator, bring it home quickly and put it in the refrigerator or freezer on an urgent basis. If the packaging says 'keep in refrigerator' or 'keep in freezer' or 'keep in cold', check that the food is properly frozen before buying.

Dos and Don'ts while selecting and buying food: Check production date, expiry date or best before date when buying packaged rice, pulses, flour

and flour; Buy by looking at the approved seal of BSTI. Buy packaged milk and milk products from trusted and recognized companies. Yogurt should be made at home if possible. Check the best before date when buying packaged milk and milk products. Purchase by looking at the approved seal of the Standards Institution (BSTI). Do not buy expired milk and dairy products unless the production date, expiry date and best before date are clearly stated on the packaging. Buy locally produced, fresh, seasonal, ripe fruits and vegetables. Buy fresh, green or colorful vegetables. While buying fruits, check whether the fruits are firm, fresh, perfect and clean; Buy juicy fruits as much as possible. Don't buy overripe, rotten, black-spotted, bruised or bugged fruits and vegetables. Buy clean and perfectly shelled eggs. Do not buy eggs that are discolored and dirty or have dirty shells.

Some techniques to keep food safe are to keep food dry away from moisture. Do not store food in non-food grade plastic containers. Use glass jars or jars or containers if possible; Keeping food storage areas clean with utmost importance, keeping non-food products (eg: washing-up products, washing powder, soap, detergents etc.) at a safe distance from food.

The government has already taken various steps to ensure the food security of the people. The process of capacity building of safe food authorities has already started. There are five important guidelines to keep families and communities healthy by ensuring safe food. These are: keeping food preparation areas clean, keeping raw and cooked food separate, cooking food properly, storing food at safe and appropriate temperatures, and using safe water and raw materials in food preparation. Approximate five lac people died, including more than one lac children under the age of five. What is unsafe, what is dangerous to eat - that is not food. Dishonest people have made food unsafe. So everyone should be aware. No development will be sustainable unless a safe diet of essential nutrients is ensured.

*Writer : Nutritionist*

*PID Feature*

# Shared Prosperity: A vision for South Asia

**Dr. A K Abdul Momen, MP**

It cannot begin without recalling our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who provided our foreign policy dictum “Friendship to all, Malice towards None” which he later focused more on promoting relations with neighbours first. His able daughter Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina aptly picked up the philosophy and extended it and went for its implementation.

The vision of shared prosperity becomes more relevant when we compare the development trajectory of South Asian countries. Indeed, we have made substantial progress. Some South Asian countries have already graduated to middle income status while others are making their way. Yet, poverty is still high in the region.

One predominant characteristic is that our economies display greater interest in integrating with the global economy than with each other. Regional cooperation within the existing frameworks has made only limited progress being hostage to political and security considerations. The problems have their roots in the historical baggage as well as the existing disparity in the regional structure. In addition, there are a number of outstanding issues and bilateral discords. All these realities have left us a message that for survival, we need closer collaboration among neighbours setting aside our differences; we must have concerted efforts through sharing of experiences and learning from each other. In this backdrop, Bangladesh has been following a policy of shared prosperity as a vision for the friendly neighbours of South Asia. Guided by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, we are advocating for inclusive development in the region. Our development trajectory and ideological stance dovetail our vision of shared prosperity for South Asia.

In Bangladesh, human development is the pillar of sustainable development. Our Father of the Nation in his maiden speech at the UNGA in 1974 said, “There is an international responsibility ... to ensuring everyone the right to a standard living adequate for the health and the well-being of himself and his family”. This vision remains relevant even today. In that spirit, we are pursuing inclusive and people-centric development in association with regional and global efforts.

In the last decade, we have achieved rapid economic growth ensuring social justice for all. Today, Bangladesh is acknowledged as one of the

fastest growing economies in the world. We have reduced poverty from 41.5% to 20% in the last 14 years. Our per capita income has tripled in just a decade. Bangladesh has fulfilled all criterions for graduating from LDC to a developing country. Bangladesh is ranked as world's 5th best COVID resilient country, and South Asia's best performer. Last year, we inaugurated the self-funded 'Padma Multi-purpose Bridge'. A few days ago, we started the first ever Metro Rail service in our capital. Soon, we shall complete the 3.2 kilometer Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Tunnel under the river Karnaphuli in Chattogram, the first in South Asia. Several other mega-projects are in the pipeline which will bring about significant economic upliftment. Our aspiration is to transform Bangladesh into a knowledge-based 'Smart Bangladesh' by 2041 and a prosperous and climate-resilient delta by 2100. We hope to attain these goals by way of ensuring women empowerment, sustainable economic growth and creating opportunities for all.

The priorities of our Government are; First, provide food, Second, provide cloths, Third, shelter and accommodation to all and no one should be left behind, Fourth, Education and Fifth, Healthcare to all. To achieve these goals, our Prime Minister promoted vehicles like Digital Bangladesh, innovation, foreign entrepreneurs and private initiatives in an atmosphere of regional peace, stability and security, and through connectivity. Bangladesh has become a hub of connectivity and looking forward to become a 'Smart Bangladesh'.

When it comes to foreign policy, we have been pursuing neighbourhood diplomacy for amiable political relations with the South Asian neighbours alongside conducting a balancing act on strategic issues based on the philosophy of "shared prosperity".

Bangladesh, within its limited resources, is always ready to stand by its neighbours in times of emergency-be it natural calamity, or pandemic or economic crisis. We despatched essential medicines, medical equipment and technical assistance to the Maldives, Nepal, Bhutan and India during the peak period of Covid-19 pandemic. We had readily extended humanitarian assistance to Nepal when they faced the deadly earthquake back in 2015. Last year, we helped the earthquake victims of Afghanistan. Prior to that, we contributed to the fund raised by the United Nations for the people of Afghanistan. Our assistance for the people of Sri Lanka with emergency medicines during the moment of crisis last year or the currency SWAP arrangement is the reflection of our commitment to our philosophy. These symbolic gestures were not about our capacity, pride or mere demonstration, rather it was purely about our sense of obligation to our neighbours. We strongly believe that shared prosperity comes with

shared responsibility and development in a single country of a particular region may not sustain if others are not taken along.

In addition, we have resolved most of our critical issues with our neighbours peacefully through dialogue and discussion. For example, we have resolved our border demarcation problem with India, our maritime boundary with India and Myanmar, and also our water sharing with India peacefully.

For an emerging region like South Asia, we need to devise certain policies and implement those in a sustainable manner. I would like to share some of my thoughts which could be explored in quest for our shared prosperity and inclusive development:

**First of all**, without regional peace and stability we would not be able to grow as aspired for. To that effect, our leaders in the region have to work closely on priority basis. We may have issues between neighbours but we have to transcend that to leave a legacy of harmony for our future generation so that a culture of peace and stability prevails in the region. We can vouch for it from our own experience. In Bangladesh, we are sheltering 1.1 million forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals. If remains unresolved, it has the potential to jeopardise the entire security architecture of South Asia. So, here the neighbourhood should support us for their own interests.

**Second**, we need to revitalize our regional platforms and properly implement our initiatives taken under BIMSTEC and IORA. We are happy that BIMSTEC is progressing better, but we should endeavour to make it move always like a rolling machine.

**Third**, we need to focus on regional trade and investment. Countries in South Asia had implemented trade liberalization within the framework of SAFTA but in a limited scale. Bangladesh is in the process of concluding Preferential Trade Agreement/Free Trade Agreement with several of its South Asian peers. We have already concluded PTA with Bhutan; are at an advanced stage of negotiations for PTA with Sri Lanka and discussions for PTA with Nepal are on. In the same spirit, Bangladesh is about to start negotiations on Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with India.

**Fourth**, a well-connected region brings immense economic benefits and leads to greater regional integration. To maximize our intra- and extra-regional trade potentials and enhance people-to-people contacts, Bangladesh is committed to regional and sub regional connectivity initiatives. Bangladesh's geostrategic location is a big leverage which was rightly picked up by our Prime Minister. She benevolently offered

connectivity in the form of transit and trans-shipment to our friendly neighbours for sustainable growth and collective prosperity of the region. As for Sri Lanka, if we can establish better shipping connectivity which our two countries are working on, the overall regional connectivity would be more robust.

**Fifth**, we live in a globalized world, highly interconnected and interdependent. Our region has gone through similar experience and history. Bangladesh believes and promotes religious harmony. We have been promoting “Culture of Peace” across nations. The basic element of “Culture of Peace” is to inculcate a mindset of tolerance, a mind set of respect towards others, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, colour, background or race. If we can develop such mindset by stopping venom of hatred towards others, we can hope to have sustainable peace and stability across nations, leading to end of violence, wars, and terrorism in nations and regions. There won’t be millions of refugees or persecuted Rohingyas. Bangladesh takes special pride in it as even before Renaissance was started in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, even before America was discovered in 1492, in Bengal a campaign was started by Chandi Das as early as 1408 that says “humanity is above all,” and we still try to promote it.

**Sixth**, we have to look beyond a traditional approach of development and challenges and revisit the non-traditional global crises of the recent time. We are experiencing food, fuel, fertilizer and energy shortages due to global politics and disruption of supply chain; as littoral and island countries we face similar challenges of natural disasters; we have vast maritime area which needs effective maritime governance; we need to curb marine pollution and ensure responsible use of marine resources. Our collective, sincere and bold efforts are required to minimize the impacts of climate change as well. In this context, I would like to share Bangladesh’s understanding and position.

### **Ocean Governance:**

**Blue Economy:** Bangladesh is an avid proponent of Blue Economy and responsible use of marine resources for the benefit of the entire region. We are keen to utilize the full potential of our marine resources and have developed an integrated maritime policy drawing on the inter-linkages between the different domains and functions of our seas, oceans and coastal areas. Bangladesh also values the importance of sound science, innovative management, effective enforcement, meaningful partnerships, and robust public participation as essential elements of Blue Economy. At this stage, we need support, technical expertise and investment for

sustainable exploration and exploitation of marine resources. As the past and present chairs of IORA, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka should find out ways of bilateral collaboration particularly in Blue Economy in the Bay of Bengal.

**i) Controlling of Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing:**

IUU fishing in the maritime territory of Bangladesh needs to be monitored and controlled. Our present capability of marine law enforcement in this regard is limited. Here regional collaboration would be very useful.

**ii) Marine Pollution:** Marine pollution is a major concern for all littoral countries. Micro-plastic contamination poses serious threat to marine eco system. Responsible tourism and appropriate legal framework underpinned by regional collaboration would greatly help.

**Climate Change and Climate Security in the Bay of Bengal:** We have taken a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to make the country climate-resilient. Our Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan were formulated in 2009. Bangladesh has pioneered in establishing a climate fund entirely from our own resources in 2009. Nearly \$443 million has been allocated to this fund since then. Moreover, we are going to implement the ‘Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan’ to achieve low carbon economic growth for optimised prosperity and partnership. Green growth, resilient infrastructure and renewable energy are key pillars of this prosperity plan. This is a paradigm shift from vulnerability to resilience and now from resilience to prosperity. As the immediate past Chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, we had promoted the interests of the climate vulnerable countries including Sri Lanka in the international platforms. Bangladesh is globally acclaimed for its remarkable success in climate adaptation, in particular in locally-led adaptation efforts. The Global Center on Adaptation (GCA) South Asia regional office in Dhaka is disseminating local based innovative adaptation strategies to other climate vulnerable countries. To rehabilitate the climate displaced people, we have undertaken one of the world’s largest housing projects which can shelter 4,500 climate displaced families. Under the “Ashrayan” project, a landmark initiative for the landless and homeless people, 450,000 families have been provided with houses. Keeping disaster resilience in mind, the project focuses on mitigation through afforestation, rainwater harvesting, solar home systems and improved cook stoves. In addition, the government has implemented river-bank protection, river excavation and dredging, building of embankment, excavation of irrigation canals and drainage canals in last 10 years at a massive scale. We feel, our national efforts need to be complemented by regional assistance.

As the chair of CVF and as a climate vulnerable country, our priority is to save this planet earth for our future generations. In order to save it, we need all countries, especially those that are major polluters, to come up with aggressive NDCs, so that global temperature remains below 1.5 degree Celsius, they should allocate more funds to climate change, they should share the burden of rehabilitation of 'climate migrants' that are uprooted from their sweet homes and traditional jobs due to erratic climatic changes, river erosion and additional salinity. We are happy that "loss and damage" has been introduced in COP-27.

**Seventh**, South Asia needs a collective voice in the international forum for optimizing their own interests.

**Finally**, and most importantly, South Asian leaders need similar political will for a better and prosperous region. We hope that Bangladesh and its neighbours in South Asia would be able to tap the potentials of each other's complementarities to further consolidate our relations to rise and shine as a region. May I conclude by reminding ourselves what a Bengali poet has said, "Don't be afraid of the cloud, sunshine is sure to follow."

*Writer : Former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh*

*PID Feature*

# Harmful Effects Of Climate Change

**Dr. Nazneen Siddiqui**

The people of Sylhet and Sunamganj districts of Bangladesh faced the worst flood of this century. In June 2022, most of the people of these two districts were trapped in the flood water. About 3 million people were affected in these two districts. Army was deployed in eight upazilas of Sylhet and Sunamganj to rescue people. The city of Sunamganj was cut off from the whole country by the flood water. About 70 thousand people of the district took shelter in 220 shelters. Osmani International Airport in Sylhet was suspended due to flood waters. Treatment operations were disrupted at Osmani Hospital due to rising water on the ground floor. All activities including patients had to be moved upstairs. The railway station was closed due to flood. All communication systems were disrupted due to power outages and telecommunication disruptions. From mid-April, severe to moderate heat wave prevails over most of the country's districts. The temperature was around 40 to 42 degrees, but felt above 45 degrees. This is happening due to climate change.

People of the world hope to get something new in this century. Such needs of people are not insignificant in terms of time. But the world is moved by a news that bypasses all demands. There is only one discussion around, one word - 'climate change'. Today the whole world is threatened by the adverse effects of climate change. There is no alternative to collective efforts to counter this threat, say experts. From individuals to the state, from the state to the international community, everyone must stand together to prevent disaster. Currently, Bangladesh contributes 0.56 percent to global carbon emissions, yet the proportion of our country's losses due to climate change is overwhelming. Sea level rise, subtropical erosion, drought, heat and flooding are all having a serious impact on our economy. Our infrastructure and agricultural industries are collapsing, as we face considerable challenges in preventing, mitigating and dealing with damage and loss related to the effects of climate change. According to study, our GDP is expected to decline significantly due to human-caused warming, and average incomes are projected to drop by 90 percent by 2100. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Assessment Report estimates that poverty in Bangladesh will increase by about 15 percent by 2030 due to climate change. Climate is not fixed at its location. It is always changing. So why so much fuss about it? There is a reason for the fuss. The normal changes in global

climate are no longer visible. The level of change is very high. The fear about Bangladesh in terms of climate change risks is that a large part of the country will one day disappear into the ocean. The fear of this crisis about Bangladesh around climate change is not unreasonable. So prevention is necessary before facing the dire reality.

Every moment of the environment we live in is unique. The condition of the environment keeps changing hour by hour. For example: Sometimes we see the intensity of the sun and sometimes the sky is cloudy. Thus, atmospheric conditions like cold, rain, heat, storm etc. make the environment unique. Climate is the long-term general state of daily weather, not average weather. The elements of climate are temperature, humidity, wind, clouds, rainfall, snowfall, barometric pressure etc. A country's geographical location and natural conditions control its climate.

The four elements of weather and climate are: air pressure, air heat, air humidity and precipitation, storms. Wind pressure is the pressure exerted by the atmosphere on the earth's surface at the Earth's diameter. Air pressure at sea level is about 14.7 pounds per square inch. It measures 29.92 inches in barometer at 45 latitude sea level. The weight of the atmosphere in the ocean is about 5,600 trillion tons. This air pressure changes due to a number of factors, one of which is heat. Air pressure changes due to variations in temperature. These elements of climate have some control over the change. The angular position of the sun is one of the regulators of climate. Oblique sunlight has to penetrate more atmosphere; But it is much more intense when the sun's rays are exposed perpendicularly, which controls the temperature of the air. Moreover, 70.8 percent of the surface is water and 29.2 percent is land. The sun's heat reaches up to 600 feet of water and up to 60 feet on land. As a result, the water becomes much hotter and this hot water moves from one region to another, increasing the temperature of that region. Airflow is also one of the regulators of climate, as air from warmer areas moves to colder areas, increasing the temperature of that area. Again, when the air from the cold region moves to the warm region, the air in that region becomes cooler. Thus the climate is controlled by these factors. There was no idea before that the earth's climate is changing. When it became known that the temperature of the earth is gradually increasing, people's anxiety increased. Current climate change was first recognized in the 18th and 19th centuries. The first warning signs of climate change we got were in the late 1950s when carbon dioxide was measured in Hawaii, and carbon dioxide was measured again in the following decade. According to that measure, carbon dioxide is increasing on Earth due to humans. Thus, the concept of climate change has been created among us since then.

Climate change occurs due to human abuse of nature. Climate is changing slowly due to natural causes, but climate is changing very rapidly due to man-made causes. Therefore, man-made factors are seen as the main cause of climate change. There is strong evidence that humans are changing the climate. And this process is carried out by humans through the production of greenhouse gases. In particular, it produces greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane. For more than 150 years after the industrial revolution, the atmosphere has been warming due to the high rate of emissions of various gases, including carbon dioxide from factories, for which humans are responsible. Climate changes due to increase in carbon dioxide, land use change, deforestation, deforestation, burning of fossil fuels, methane gas emissions, agriculture etc. Also, reduction of navigability of rivers, water pollution, noise pollution, oil pollution also play a special role in climate change. An increase in the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere increases the temperature of the atmosphere. Moreover, the gradual depletion of the ozone layer helps the sun's ultraviolet rays to enter the earth directly. Ultraviolet rays destroy the earth's environment and destroy the living environment. This situation changes the climate. But carbon dioxide mainly increases due to the growth of additional industries, vehicles, brick -fields, various materials of urbanization (ie: various parts that emit carbon dioxide) etc.

In addition, large amounts of carbon dioxide are produced due to the burning of chemical wastes. These chemical wastes are generated from various industries. Where there is extreme greed of people. The biggest step to prevent climate change is to make people aware. Awareness about climate change mitigation and adaptation to climate change. Only then will it be possible to reduce the impact of climate change along with mitigating the damage of climate change.

***Writer : Freelancer***

***PID Feature***

# **Corruption Must Be Stopped For Social Justice**

**Sajal Mahmud**

Bangladesh has achieved enviable success in economic progress. Not only the economy, Bangladesh's achievements in various social indicators such as infant mortality, maternal mortality, average life expectancy, etc. have been praised globally. In order to continue this trend of success, corruption and irregularities must be prevented and honesty and justice must be established at all levels of the state.

Corruption is considered as one of the main obstacles to the socio-economic progress of Bangladesh. The reality is that corruption is a crime that undermines all development. Goal number 16 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals is to create peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. It can be understood from this that it is not possible to build effective accountability institutions without eradicating corruption. Corruption is considered as a global problem. Because there is a prevalence of corruption in all developed, developing and underdeveloped countries. Corruption deprives people of the benefits of democracy and the rule of law. Through this, human rights are violated, market management is distorted, organized crime increases. The impact of corruption is more pronounced in developing countries. Corruption gradually cripples the economic capacity of the state. Bangladesh Anti-Corruption Commission is continuously conducting multi-dimensional activities to combat this all-encompassing crime. The Commission is carrying out its duties in an integrated manner in anti-corruption, control, prevention and development of anti-corruption social values by following the existing laws and regulations. The Commission is constantly conducting numerous preventive operations to prevent corruption before it takes place. Due to these operations it has been possible to prevent corruption in some cases before it takes place. Government assets have been recovered, numerous citizens have received their desired services without harassment, service providers have become aware. Again, as soon as the incident of corruption occurs, action is also taken to investigate the complaint. Criminals are prosecuted. They were investigated and handed over to the law. In other words, prevention, investigation,

investigation and prosecution are carried out with equal importance from the Anti-Corruption Commission. Again, the commission is arranging interaction between government officials and service-seeking people through activities like public hearings. Through this, on the one hand, local government officials have to be held accountable, and citizens are becoming aware of their rights. Overall, anti-corruption awareness is developing at the grassroots level.

Through the commission's own outreach program, the country's city, metropolis, district, upazila, and even the union level, through the anti-corruption committee, which consists of citizens with a clean image, is implementing various programs with the aim of instilling honesty and loyalty in the society. It is also annual with students of educational institutions. Conducting various cultural activities including debate competition, essay competition. These activities are being conducted from the country's villages to the capital's educational institutions. The youth will rise against corruption. It is the son who will restrain the father from corruption. In anticipation of this, the Commission on Youth is working on a long-term strategy. However, it is not yet time to say that the level of corruption has decreased as per public demand. But it may be true that public awareness against corruption has increased. It may have broken the idea that the law will not touch me. The mindset of the criminal to think himself above the law has also changed. Yet the reality is that it is difficult for the ACC as a single institution to control a multidimensional criminal offense like corruption with limited resources. It is natural that strong protests will come from every level of society to control corruption. Teachers-students, mass media, civil society, bureaucracy, politicians, professionals together with all come forward from their own position against corruption will end the ugly culture of corruption. A pure society of pure people will be built. The realization of the constitutional promise will come when the state will block all avenues to enjoy unearned income. Bangladesh will emerge in the light by cutting the darkness.

Social power can play the biggest role in preventing these few corrupt greedy people from corruption. People's intense hatred of the socially corrupt can be the most powerful weapon in controlling corruption. There is no alternative to economic development and education for the development of self-esteem of people. Many say that the beauty of education is to acquire the ability to judge what is right and what is wrong. The Anti-Corruption Commission is working relentlessly to prevent corruption as a major obstacle to economic development and education of the people. If we deeply analyze the Sustainable Development Goals

declared by the United Nations, then the essence is to educate the youth with quality education to build a sustainable future. Anti-Corruption Commission is conducting multi-dimensional activities as a small effort to inculcate moral values in the minds of young students. According to various studies, it is very difficult to change the thinking and mentality of mature people. However, to build a corruption-free society, it is essential to change the mindset of people. Anti-Corruption Commission is implementing various programs for this purpose. However, priority is being given to the youth in the implementation of these programs. Strategies have been adopted to prevent corruption by instilling moral values in their minds. As part of this strategy, debate competitions are being organized for the students of most of the secondary education institutions in the country to develop their moral values. One of ACC's objectives is to create anti-corruption social movement through the active participation of teachers-students, parents and local dignitaries through these creative programs. In 2017, the commission formed 25 government institution-based institutional teams to ensure good governance, institutional capacity building and harassment-free government services of the country's government institutions. The institutional team identifies the sources and causes of corruption, irregularities, mismanagement, public harassment in the concerned institutions and formulates clear recommendations to prevent them. The members of this institutional team prepare recommendations by discussing with various stakeholders, reviewing various documents, analyzing the existing laws and regulations of all those institutions, inspecting various activities on the ground, reviewing information received from the media and information received from intelligence sources of the commission. In 2019, the monitoring report of 08 institutional teams has been sent by the commission through the cabinet department to the concerned ministries for taking necessary measures.

Corruption is one of the main obstacles to the socio-economic progress of Bangladesh. Many of our progress is destroyed due to corruption. No country in the world has been able to completely stop corruption, but many countries have succeeded in controlling corruption.

*Writer : NGO Worker*

*Pid Feature*

## **Intake Naturally Ripen Fruits: Consumers Awareness Crucial**

**AHM Masum Billah**

Fruit consumption is essential for preserving a healthy diet, as fruits are rich in nutrients and vitamins. However, consuming improperly matured and chemically ripened fruits can be detrimental to human health. Sadly, some unscrupulous farmers and businesspeople transport unripe mangoes, lychees, bananas, papayas, pineapples, and guavas to market, ripening them with chemicals such as calcium carbide or ethylene. Although these chemicals make fruits more appealing to consumers, they are potentially hazardous to human health.

When fruits are harvested before they have reached maturity, they lack vital nutrients, such as vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Consequently, the nutritional value of unripe fruits is lower than that of matured fruits. Moreover, the chemicals used to ripen fruits can be harmful to human health. Calcium carbide, for instance, contains trace amounts of arsenic and phosphorus that, when consumed, can cause food poisoning, diarrhea, vomiting, headache, and even cancer. When inhaled in significant quantities, ethylene gas can cause respiratory problems. Such fruits also have a shorter shelf life and can spoil quickly due to the untimely harvesting and chemical treatments.

Calcium carbide is sometimes used to ripen fruits. Because it is less expensive, impure calcium carbide is frequently used, despite the fact that it contains traces of toxic compounds that can cause severe health problems. Farmers use carbide to imitate the vibrant colors of completely ripe fruits on the fruit's outer skin, thereby making the fruit appear more appealing. However, consumers may not realize they are purchasing produce ripened with harmful chemicals.

Consuming chemically matured fruits can deprive the body of essential vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients required for proper functioning. These fruits can also cause digestive issues, such as bloating and gas. In some cases, they can trigger allergic reactions. Another severe health risk associated with consuming untimely prematurely ripened fruits is an increased risk of cancer.

Apart from affecting human health, the production of chemically matured fruits has negative environmental impacts. The chemicals used in their production, such as ethylene gas and calcium carbide, can contaminate soil and water, causing harm to the ecosystem.

Mango is one of the most popular fruits in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, some dishonest farmers try to harvest them prematurely to meet high

demand. Similarly, lychees have a short shelf life and are highly perishable, so they are usually consumed within a few days of harvesting. In some cases, farmers may use chemicals to extend their shelf life, further exposing consumers to harmful chemicals.

To combat the premature ripening of fruits with chemicals, the Government of Bangladesh has enacted laws and regulations to control their use. The Department of Agriculture Extension has determined the appropriate time to collect and sell a particular variety of mango produced in a particular district. The early season mangoes mostly come from Satkhira, while a significant amount is produced in Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, and Naogaon.

To facilitate the collection of different types of mangoes in these districts, mango calendars are created. In Satkhira district this year, the harvesting of Gopalbhog, Govindbhog, Bombay, Golapkhas, and Baisakhi, as well as other local varieties of mangoes, will begin on May 12. The harvesting of Himsagar and Khirshapati mangoes will commence on May 25. Langra mango will be available on June 1, and Amrapali on June 15.

The government is taking legal action against those who harvest mangoes from trees before the appropriate time or mix unripe mangoes with carbide and chemicals to market them. The government has awareness campaigns to inform consumers about the dangers of eating prematurely ripened fruits. These campaigns emphasize the health risks associated with consuming chemically ripened fruits and promote the consumption of fully ripe fruits for better health.

However, consumers should also take steps to ensure that they are buying fully ripened fruits that are safe to consume. Fully ripened fruits have a characteristic aroma and a sweet taste. In contrast, fruits that have been prematurely harvested and chemically ripened lack these qualities. Consumers should also avoid fruits that have a uniform color, as this may be a sign that they have been artificially ripened. Additionally, washing fruits thoroughly before consuming them can help remove any traces of harmful chemicals.

It is important to choose fully ripened fruits and promote the cultivation and consumption of naturally grown fruits to maintain good health and a sustainable environment. The government of Bangladesh has taken measures to control premature ripening of fruits through law enforcement, promotion of natural ripening methods and awareness campaigns. Before the appropriate season of the fruits, consumers should refrain from consuming chemically treated unripe fruits.

***Writer: DPIO (Admin), PID***

# Government Activities In Poverty Alleviation

**Dr. Ruma Islam**

Significant success has been achieved in the poverty alleviation of Bangladesh by government and private efforts and the coordinated efforts of various social enterprises. As a result of the implementation of the government's planned policies, the poverty rate in Bangladesh has decreased despite the global recession due to the effects of the Russia-Ukraine war after the Covid-19 outbreak. According to the preliminary report of the 'Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2022', the country currently has a poverty rate of 18.7 percent and an extreme poverty rate of 5.6 percent. Note that according to the 2016 Khana Income and Expenditure Survey, the poverty and extreme poverty rates were 24.3 percent and 12.9 percent respectively. However, the poverty rate has decreased more in urban areas than in rural areas. This rate is 5.9 percent in rural areas and 4.2 percent in urban areas.

Bangladesh's success in implementing poverty alleviation strategies such as expanding social safety nets for people at risk of poverty, financial incentives, encouraging micro-savings, effective disaster risk reduction programs and building resilience to the effects of climate change has attracted global attention. In order to implement various programs taken by the government to reduce poverty, various public and private institutions, autonomous organizations are running various activities including providing micro loans. Besides, the government is taking steps for the welfare of poor people of the country by providing old age allowance, widow and widower allowance, destitute women allowance in social security provisions. On the one hand, the government is implementing multifaceted development projects with the aim of structural transformation of the economy, on the other hand, it is constantly increasing the scope of the social safety net to reduce poverty and inequality for inclusive development. In addition to the large development programs, multi-faceted programs are being conducted simultaneously to meet the basic needs of the backward, poor and helpless people of the society.

Notable among the social security programmes are the old age allowance program; Widow and Spouse Women's Allowance Scheme; Insolvent Disability Allowance Programme; Scholarship programme for students with disabilities; Programmes to improve the quality of life of the

transgender community; Development of the Living standards of the Bede community; Development programmes for the quality of life of backward community; Disability Identification Survey Program; Rehabilitation and alternative employment for people involved with begging; Financial support Programmes for patients with cancer, kidney, liver cirrhosis, stroke, paralysis ,congenital heart disease and thalassemia and Life improvement programme for tea workers. In the current financial year, the number of beneficiaries in the social security sector is 1crore 15 lakh 71 thoudsand 567 and Tk 1,30,08 crore has been allocated.

In the financial year 2023-24, the number of elderly beneficiaries is 58.01 lakh, the number of widows and dependent women beneficiaries is 25.75 lakh and the number of beneficiaries under the education stipend program for disabled students is 1 lakh. Also, the number of disability allowance beneficiaries has been increased from 23.65 lakh to 29 lakh in the financial year 2022-23 and the monthly allowance has been increased from Tk 750 to Tk 850. At present, under the social security program, the beneficiaries of only these four programs total 106.41 lakh people, which is about 3.47 percent more than the total beneficiaries of the previous financial year. With the aim of building a digital Bangladesh of the government, allowances are currently being given to all individuals under the digital management system for the convenience of the beneficiaries. 115.741 lakh beneficiaries under Social Security Programme are receiving benefits through G2P system through MFS Institutions ‘Cash’, ‘Bikash’ and Agent Banking. In addition to various programs like food assistance, food in exchange for work, sale of goods in the open market, the government also provides cash assistance under the social security programme. A brief description of some of the important activities related to cash assistance under the Social Safety Net Program is presented below:

**Elderly Allowance Programme:** This program was started from the fiscal year 1997-98. Initially 5 men and 5 women per ward were given allowance at the rate of 100 taka per month. The number of beneficiaries and the amount of allowance have been increased gradually. Poor and vulnerable senior citizens of the society whose age is 65 years or above in case of men and 62 years or above in case of women can come under this scheme. In the financial year 2023-24, the number of beneficiaries under this programme is 58.01 lakh, each of whom is getting monthly allowance at the rate of Rs.600.

**Widows and Deserted Women’s Allowance Programme:** With the aim of social protection and empowerment of poor, vulnerable and backward women, the Government of Bangladesh launched the ‘Widows and Deserted Women’s Allowance’ program in the fiscal year 1998-99. Initially, under this program, 4.03 lakh women were getting allowance at

the rate of Tk 100 per month. In the financial year 2023-24, the number of beneficiaries is 25.75 lakhs, each of whom is getting allowance at the rate of Rs.550 per month. Maternity Allowance for Poor Mothers: Maternity Allowance was introduced for the first time in the financial year 2007-08. Financial assistance is mainly provided to poor mothers in rural areas under this. Under this programme, poor pregnant women are given health and nutrition training along with allowances. Earlier this allowance was paid at the rate of 500 taka per month. At present, the monthly maternity allowance for poor mothers has been increased to Tk 800. Besides, the period of payment of allowance has also been increased from 24 months to 36 months.

**Working Lactating Mother Support Fund:** This programme started from the financial year 2010-11. This allowance is provided to working poor mothers in urban areas to support maternal health and full development of their unborn child or newborn child. Dhaka, Narayanganj and Gazipur garment industrial areas and all city corporations/municipalities of the country have been included in this programme. Earlier, a mother used to get this support for 24 months by paying Tk 500 per month. Both the amount and duration of allowance have been increased from FY 2018-19. A mother gets this support for 36 months by paying Tk 800 per month.

**Freedom Fighter Honorary Allowance:** The government is working tirelessly to improve the quality of life of freedom fighters, the best children of the nation. From the financial year 2021-22, the honorarium of freedom fighters has been increased from Tk 12,000 to Tk 20,000 per month. Awarded freedom fighters are being given 2 festival allowances at the rate of 10 thousand taka per year along with honorarium allowance. At present, monthly honorarium is paid at the rate of Rs 35,000 to Bir Shrestha, Rs 25,000 to Bir Uttam and Rs 20,000 to Bir Bikram and Bir Pratikam. At present, all the freedom fighters are being given honorarium in G2P system in all the districts of the country. Bengali New Year allowance of Tk 2,000 is being given to freedom fighters from the financial year 2018-19 along with honorary allowance and festival allowance. Besides, special honorarium of 5000 taka per head is being given to all living freedom fighters on the occasion of Victory Day. A separate program has been launched for the treatment and honorarium of the families of martyrs and war injured freedom fighters.

**Allowance for indigent disabled persons:** The indigent disabled allowance programme was introduced in the financial year 2005-06. Under this programme, in the beginning, 1 lakh 4 thousand 166 disabled persons were given allowance at the rate of Tk 200 per month. In the financial year 2023-24, 29 lakh beneficiaries are getting allowance at the rate of Tk 850 per month. Education stipend for disabled students

Through the Ministry of Social Welfare, the program of 'Education stipend for disabled students' was launched in the financial year 2007-08. In the beginning, the number of beneficiaries under this programme was 12 thousand 209 people. Under this program in the financial year 2023-24, 01 lakh beneficiaries are being given stipend at the rate of 900 taka per month at the primary level, 950 taka at the secondary and higher secondary level and 01 thousand 0300 taka at the higher level. Capitation Grant of Private Orphanage: Capitation grant of Tk 2,000 per person is provided for taking care of up to 50 percent of orphans in private orphanages registered by Department of Social Services with a minimum of 10 orphans.

Livelihood Development Program of Bede Community: In the fiscal year 2012-13, the implementation of this programme was started as a pilot in 7 districts of the country namely Dhaka, Chittagong, Dinajpur, Patuakhali, Jessore, Naogaon and Habiganj districts. Currently, this program is being implemented in a total of 64 districts by expanding the programme.

The main goal of the current government is to move forward with all those who are backward in the society. And only through this, a developed Bangladesh without discrimination, hunger and poverty will be possible.

*Writer : Economist*

*PID Feature*

# **Covid-19: Lockdown In My House With My Family And Our Mental Health**

**Sayere Nazabi Sayem**

COVID-19 or the novel coronavirus is a virus that was first identified in Wuhan, China back in December 2019. Ever since, it has spread globally, appearing to be a continuous pandemic that struck Bangladesh in March 2020. As of 1st June 2020, almost 50 thousand people in Bangladesh were infected and 600+ people have lost their lives. Similar to the worldwide scenario, Bangladesh too had a steep rise of infections. Since there are no particular vaccines/treatments for the COVID-19 fevers, the government enabled a lockdown and ordered people to quarantine themselves at home to stop further infections starting March 26th. This resulted in residing with our families 24 hours of the day for almost 3 months straight and acquiring experiences like never before, in the longest confinement of our lives.

The small little family of mine of my parents, younger sister, grandma and cat, became very lazy this quarantine. It is a bittersweet feeling to always seeing these very familiar faces. One minute I'm dying to go out of the house whereas the next minute, I feel all nostalgic after listening to stories from my grandma and want to hear more, while she braids my oiled hair. The day to day scenario now reminds me of my childhood when life was simpler, my time was mostly devoted to my loved ones and sans the everyday rush of meeting newer goals. No one has to leave for work as they can attend meetings from home, I don't have to leave for classes nor does my sister have school. Our cat is extremely surprised to have us all at home for these many days with contrast to how previously she used to roam around in empty rooms, have no one to play around with and sleep all day, bored. But now it has been so long that she almost reached her breaking point; her face tells that she is annoyed by cuddles 24 hours of the day. We used to go for walks in the neighbourhood until some of our neighbours started getting infected. Besides age, coronavirus is known to attack diabetic, lung and heart patients more easily. My father and grandma are diabetic and heart patients while my mother has severe lung disease, sarcoidosis and I have acute asthma so we decided to be extra cautious and carefully handled all foreign items entering the house. Moreover, my cat, Minerva, is weak and if she gets sick, it will create an abysmal situation since there are no available vet clinics nearby

in this time of crisis. We have to live like this; in fear of getting infected, while spending quality time with our families.

Unfortunately, not all families are all loving or comfortable with each other. I have observed my friend, Zarin trying to find solace while being with her friends, out all day and reluctant to be at home. Her father is abusive towards her mom and her because of his uncontrolled alcoholism and short-temper. She and her mother have been suffering from domestic violence, both verbal and physical from a very long time. We were always there when she needed us, cheering her up as we were her only option to some little happiness. During this pandemic, she is forced to stay at home at all times and face brutality. The torture of beating and thrashing has always taken a toll on her mental health and the risk of her losing sanity is now even more. I try video-calling her every day and ask everyone else to do too, cheering and motivating her up to keep patience until it is all over. Mental health is no joke so we asked her to keep constant checks on some important apps (like Maya app that has online chat counselling facilities) or websites (like Online Counselling Bangladesh to talk to psychologists and counsellors) to stay healthy. And if things get too out of hand or unbearable to stay at home, it may be helpful to reach out to relatives, friends and neighbours and to seek support from a hotline. The government of our nation, Bangladesh has kept many toll free helplines open via the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, even during this pandemic: 109, 10921 and so on. No one is alone and we shall not feel vulnerable either.

A distant relative of mine, my aunt, is a victim of polygamy. Her husband remarried and we heard that she is facing physical abuse every day. Firstly, the man has committed several crimes: according to section 16 of the Special Marriage Act, 1872 and section 494 of the Penal Code 1860, he shall be punished for marrying again midst his current marriage and also violated the Women & Children Repression Prevention Act 2000 by torturing a woman, let alone his wife. According to this Act, the word 'woman' implies to, a woman of any age and 'child' means any personage under the age of sixteen. 'Repression' suggests violence which is all kinds of assaults to woman and children, whether in forms of physical or mental. It was prefaced with great expectation to diminish and eradicate brutality against women and children.

We have been trying to contact her to take actions immediately because the judiciary matters are open and she can always seek for help from the law. The concern of women and children are sophisticated in our legal system.

The times are challenging but not impossible to conquer. Since vaccines have been created, prevention of corona virus is so stay at home. But this does not mean that we shall forget humanity and our morals. We should help anyone we can within our limitations; be it financially or just a simple phone call to remind them “it’s okay and you can do this!”

PID Feature

# Bangabandhu and the Media

**Afroza Nice Rima**

We all know history is intimately bound up with social, political and economic institutions and it is equally closely with cultural life, that is, with television, radio, fiction, film, drama, art, news media and so on. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the great Bengali of the millennium, the great hero of history, the father of the nation was leader of visionary inspiration, courage, a sage of peace, and a champion of justice equity and equality. His political, socio-economic and cultural views of life were similar on the question of national ethos and the identity of the mass people which is making it into a positive and progressive country. We find that mass media plays a great role to raise about political life of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. William Crawley in recalling his own journalistic experience of Bangladesh's charismatic founder and leader, reflects on perceptions of 'Bangabandhu' in the British and the global press, said the emergence of an independent Bangladesh was without doubt, as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman himself recognised, the high point of that legacy and the one of which he was most proud. The media have been widely described as the fourth estate, agenda setter, force multiplier, watchdog and gate-keeper, all in all effort to demonstrate influence on society whereas, according to Gilpin, 'it cannot be said that states have interests, only moral agents can have interests.' Thus the objectives and foreign policies of states are determined priority by the interests of their dominant members or ruling coalition '(Burchill, 2005, p.49). Thus Bangabandhu and mass media interplay within the national and international arena.

Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman worked for the welfare of the people of the country till his death. After independence, he started working to rebuild the country and build a war-torn Bangladesh. Naturally, it became very difficult to run the country. So he took the initiative to temporarily build a new platform in politics by passing the normal stream of his cherished dream-democracy.

Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a media friend since his student days. The location of the journalist and newspaper office was close to his heart. He also had many friends among the journalists. His immortal creation gratefully expresses his deep interest and faith in the media in the first book, the Unfinished Memoirs, and the second in the Prison Diaries. Because the role of media in all

the movements and struggles of Bangladesh and in the great liberation war was infinite. This great leader termed the newspapers and electronic media during the liberation war as 'mass media' and not just 'news media'. Through his writings in those books, he has remembered not only the media, but also the media personalities with deep confidence and respect. The contribution of the media in the language movement, the outstanding contribution of the media in presenting the six-point demand as a 'demand for human survival' is also highlighted in his two books. Throughout his life, Bangabandhu spoke of freedom of expression. Talking about the importance of media in his Unfinished Memoirs, Bangabandhu said, "my father used to keep a newspaper; Anandabazar, Basumati, Azad, MasikMohammadi and Saugat. He then spoke about the media politics of east bengal at that time and the history of the steps taken by the leaders of this section for the welfare of the people at that time. In these two books, he also spoke openly about the owners of various newspapers of that time and their role. Even praised a magazine. Never again did he stop criticizing the role of any newspaper in the field. "in the 1940s, Dainik Azad was the only Bengali newspaper to support the Muslim League and the Pakistan movement," he said. Maulana Akram Khan, the founder and owner of this paper,

was the president of the Bengal provincial Muslim League. Many of us started hawking in the streets and selling paper. The paper became very popular with the intellectual community. Many Hindus also read the paper. Its name was 'Millat'.

Bangabandhu relied on the news published in the media to get the news of his politics. He also wrote in his Unfinished Memoirs how the media helped Bangabandhu in establishing an independent Bangladesh. "my press conference statement was very well published in Nawai Waqt, Pakistan times, Imroz and other papers," he said. Pro-government papers also criticized my statement. I emphasized the state language Bengali, the release of political prisoners, the protest against the shootings, autonomy and economic problems. 'After the assassination of Bangabandhu on 15 august 1975, a group tried to portray Bangabandhu's weakness towards the media in a negative light. They began to sharply criticize the Newspaper Declaration Enrollment Ordinance, which was passed on June 16, 1975. But the law was made on the advice of journalist leaders. Bangabandhu ensured that journalists get regular salaries and allowances. He confirmed the salaries of journalists and employees who were shut down after June 16, 1975. They would go to the treasury one day and bring the salary.

William Crawley described that as a new recruit to the BBC external

services radio services (better known as the BBC world service) in november 1970, I had a small part in the reporting of the events which marked Sheikh Mujib's crowning achievement, and in analyzing the events that followed up to and beyond his assassination. I did not know him personally, but I saw his public and political personality in action at an election rally in Narayanganj in 1973 and I took part in an interview with him for the BBC Bengali service on one occasion when he was passing through London as Prime Minister. I was able to see the charisma that he brought to his nationalist convictions and aspirations, and the admiration he inspired in his followers. What I can bear witness to is the way Sheikh Mujib emerged from the relative obscurity of a provincial east Bengali politician within the context of Pakistan, into the international limelight. He shattered Mohammed Ali Jinnah's dream – and 24-year achievement – of a united Pakistan. It is worth recalling the coverage of these momentous events in the British media, and the people who contributed to the BBC's reporting at the time. The election in December 1970 and the decisive victory in East Pakistan of Mujib's Awami League underlined a wider importance of the BBC. 'Sheikh Mujibur Rahman... was introduced to the world by the BBC,' recalled Musa, who was at that time also correspondent of The Times (London) and The Sunday times, and through them was appointed to the then newly established Asian news service based in Hong kong. Sheikh Mujib's arrest, and the crackdown on society and political activity by the military regime in East Pakistan in March 1971, made him even more of a household name in the international media. Of the british journalists, Simon Dring of the daily telegraph had managed to evade the expulsion of foreign correspondents, reporting on events for his paper and for the Washington post for several days. Martin Adeney had been in Dhaka for the guardian, while Peter Hazelhurst covered phases of the story for the times. The Pakistani journalist Anthony Mascarenhas, sent by the Pakistan government to report on the situation, defected and wrote a powerful first-hand exposé of the army repression for The Sunday Times. The distinguished American correspondent Murray Sayle some weeks later wrote an influential report in the same paper. The BBC World Service and the Bengali Service interviewed others who had managed to leave East Pakistan and their testimony both undercut local censorship and internationally added to a damning picture of the Pakistani army's role. His release and flight to London on 8

January 1972, in a Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) plane, arranged by the new leader of west Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, restored him immediately to the centre of the political stage. After meetings with the British prime minister Edward Heath and Harold Wilson, then

leader of the opposition labour party, and a meeting with the Indian high commissioner Apa Pant, Sheikh Mujib gave a memorable press conference at Claridge's hotel, in which he was questioned in detail about his present position and that of an independent Bangladesh. At an international press conference on 8 January 1972 at Claridge's hotel, London, a resolute and determined Bangabandhu sought support from Britain and international community to rebuild his war-ravaged country.

At present Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Silver Jubilee programme of Dhaka Reporters' Unity, urged that journalists work risking their lives and many inside stories come to light with their reports. As a result, necessary action can be taken to solve various problems. In fine, quoting Father of the Nation Bangabandhu, she said like politics journalism without principle can give nothing to the country and the nation.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the first to protect the freedom of speech of journalists. Bangabandhu has played an important role in strengthening the media. And he was the first person in the history of independent and sovereign Bangladesh to work for the media. And he also arranged salary allowances for journalists, freedom of the press and national recognition of the media.

In a word, Bangladesh and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the poet of politics is the ultimate emancipation whose spirit soared immeasurably in heightened expectations.

***Writer : Senior Information Officer, PID***

***PID Feature***

# Everyone Should Know The Right To Information

**Swapan Bhattachurch**

Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman awakened the Bangali nation through a long movement and struggle and initiated the mantra of independence step by step. Under his strong leadership, independent and sovereign Bangladesh emerged in 1971. In independent Bangladesh, he wrote the constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in 1972. The people are recognized as possessors of all power. Article 39 of the Constitution includes the right to freedom of thought, conscience and speech as well as the right to information as one of the basic human rights of the citizen. This is how he reflected the decision of the United Nations i.e. the World Assembly for the first time.

Based on the power of the constitution, the draft law on right to information was prepared with the joint efforts of human rights activists, media personalities, academicians, civil society, non-governmental organizations. Ordinance passed in 2008. On the eve of the national elections in 2008, only the Awami League among the then major parties pledged to ensure free flow of information in its election manifesto. On March 29, 2009, the first session of the National Parliament passed the Right to Information Act, gazetted it and established the commission. From that, the legal recognition of the establishment of their right to information for the empowerment of the people in Bangladesh. Note that the Right to Information Act was enacted and implemented in India in 2005. Bangladesh Right to Information Act 2009 is a modern, unique and progressive law. In this law, the people exercise power over the authorities; Demands accounts of the authority's work, services and budget; In other laws the authority exercises power over the people.

Our Right to Information Act is undoubtedly universal and inclusive. Access to public information is a stepping stone to the fulfillment of all other fundamental human rights. But among our large population the backward, disadvantaged, crippled, disabled, sick, widows, elderly, abject poverty, floating, vulnerable children and women, minorities, illiterate, are ignorant of fundamental rights, taken for granted. Moreover, the lack of information signature is clearly present at different levels of society starting from the grassroots. On this occasion, many authorities also show deliberate reluctance and reluctance to provide and disclose information instead of showing the required level of sensitivity towards these communities. But the core of the constitution is that the people are

the source of all the powers of the republic and the duty of every person engaged in the work of the republic is to try to serve the people. For these reasons, many intellectuals consider our law to be modern and progressive.

The general idea is that the owner of the information is the state or the government or the authority in the language of the law. It is the authority's own business, as much as the public will know, as much as the authority will kindly inform. Again, many people think that these are matters of the developed world or the West. On the other hand, many of those who will give information or who have public information have not changed the culture or mentality or attitude of keeping information secret even in an era, they are stuck in the fence of secrecy. In Bangladesh, the Right to Information Act 2009 has given mandatory and legal recognition to the right of all citizens to seek, obtain, and benefit from all necessary information. By creating free flow of information and ensuring people's right to information, the way is paved for their empowerment. By increasing the transparency and accountability of authorities, reducing corruption and establishing good governance, the path to democracy has been paved.

India's Right to Information Act is one of the most developed, modern and progressive laws in the world. It is considered a model for the Asian continent and a benchmark in law reviews of other countries in the region. In the background of such strong legislation was the grassroots social movement in various states of India for right to information. Moreover, among the Asian countries, India has the largest number of civil society organizations directly responsible for information rights activists. In the background of law making in Bangladesh, the role of non-governmental organizations was very important. However, considerable positive steps have been taken in the implementation of the law established in public interest. The achievement is no less. There are more than 42,000 responsible officers of various public and private authorities across the country. All these offices have alternative responsible officers and appeal officers.

The first official record-keeping was initiated in the Senate of the observatory of Rome in order to ensure the accuracy of administrative work and to provide accurate information to the people. It was the institutional phase of right to information. The history of deprivation of information is as old as the history of deprivation of rights of the common people. At the stage of the development of civilization, the class division in the society has been done by the powerful people who have blinded the common people. Safeguards their wealth, wealth and power. Again, the issue of people's right to know has been taken into consideration since the stage of development of civilization, so the relationship between the right to information and the development of democracy is very close.

It is said that Finland is the cradle of information rights movement. But Finland was under Sweden at that time. In 1766, Sweden's Press Freedom Act was passed. Through this law, Swedish people are guaranteed access to documents created or received in public institutions. Government, Parliament, Church, Local Government Acts, Legislatures are all under its purview. Governments are forced to provide free and fast information. This is the first law in the world to ensure access to information of citizens. The role of the French Revolution in establishing the right to information was significant. Through the French Revolution in 1789, France was the first to recognize the right to information as a human right of every citizen. The people of France have the right to demand from a public official an account of his administration. However, the Right to Information Act was enacted in France in 1978. Access to information and the right to information was being established throughout Europe and America when the Indian subcontinent became a British colony. In 1757, when freedom was fading in the wilderness of Palashi, the people were sitting at home clapping their hands and chanting, "The battle is between kings and kings, see who loses and who wins". Far from freedom of information, the region was drowning in the brutality of subjugation. Moreover, in British India, due to the promulgation of the 'Official Secrets Act' in 1923, the culture of information secrecy matured. It did not improve much even during the Pakistan era. Meanwhile, the United Nations was established in the middle of the 20th century. The General Assembly of the United Nations recognized the right to information as a fundamental right through a resolution on December 14, 1946. Later, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was issued by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. Article 19 of the Declaration expressly enshrines freedom of information as a universal human right. This is one of the events in the history of establishment of right to information. Thereafter, the right to information was further consolidated by incorporating the United Nations' International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights adopted on 16 December 1966. Apart from this, the right to information is recognized in various international documents including the 'Commonwealth Principles of Freedom of Information', the European Union Human Rights Convention. Since then, freedom of information or right to information laws have been enacted in various countries, the number of which is 129 so far.

One of the goals of the current generation is to create a corruption-free society for future generations by ensuring transparency and accountability by providing information to the public.

***Writer : Human Rights Activist***

***PID Feature***

# **Success Of Cotton Cultivation In Poverty Alleviation**

**Dr. Mahatab Kabir**

Cotton is the main raw material of textile mills and a cash crop to farmers. Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman established the Cotton Development Board in 1972 with the aim of introducing cotton cultivation in Bangladesh for the development of textile industry and sustainable development of the country. The Cotton Development Board has been providing necessary support to make cotton cultivation more profitable for the farmers. The Cotton Development Board provides support to farmers in research, extension, distribution of microcredit and marketing of cotton. As a result of the concerted action taken by the Cotton Development Board under the auspices of the present government, the production of cotton in the country has increased consistently over the past few years. Through the research of the Cotton Development Board, a total of 20(twenty) has released high yielding varieties. Chinese hybrid cotton seeds are being cultivated at field level from 2009-10 season by government and private initiatives, yielding 12-15 maunds per bigha.

Bangladesh is the world's second largest cotton consumer and largest importer country. Bangladesh ranks second only to China in terms of imports as the local garment industry is highly dependent on cotton imports place. More than 74 percent of Bangladesh's garment exports are cotton garments. But in this case the global picture is completely different. Overall, 78 percent of the world's manufactured clothing is handwoven. Local entrepreneurs have also increased investment in handwoven fabrics to strengthen their position in the global market. Cotton spinning capacity in Bangladesh is in good condition. Local spinners are able to supply 95 percent of the yarn for the knitting sector and 40 percent of the materials for the oven sector.

The textile and clothing industry is divided into two parts in the global market. One part is natural fiber i.e. cotton yarn and the other part is artificial fiber based on man made fiber i.e. polyester, nylon, viscose etc. Historically, the textile and clothing sector of Bangladesh is dependent on natural fiber and cotton yarn. But there has been a major change in the textile and clothing sector in the global market in the last 10 years. That is, 70 percent of the textile and clothing market is now occupied by synthetic yarn polyester or man made fiber. And 30 percent is occupied by clothes made of cotton yarn.

Bangladesh's strong position in the global market of ready-made garments is based on the natural fiber and cotton yarn based garment industry. Bangladesh usually imports cotton from India, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and African countries. Local mills import the most cotton from India. Cotton is imported from the neighboring country through the sea port of Calcutta and the land port of Benapole. Due to relatively short geographical distance with India, shipment takes less time. As a result, transportation and other logistics costs are also relatively low. The quality of cotton produced in our country is equal to the quality of imported cotton. The annual fiber demand of 407 spinning mills in our country is more or less 50-60 lakh bales (1 bale = 182 kg). Current production is only 3-4 percent of domestic demand. 10-15 percent of the total demand locally. To meet the increased demand, the Cotton Development Board has adopted an action plan for cotton cultivation in one lakh hectares of land by 2030. To expand cotton cultivation without disrupting food production, the Cotton Development Board has started work by earmarking non-traditional areas such as tobacco and agroforestry land for cotton cultivation. Since cotton is drought and salinity tolerant, cotton cultivation is being expanded in drought, saline, pasture and hilly areas. Without disrupting food production, it is possible to produce one million bales of fiber cotton by cultivating cotton in less productive areas such as Barendra, Char, hilly and coastal areas. In the southern part of the country, the work of expanding cotton cultivation has started in rabi season in fallow land after Aman paddy harvesting. At present there are expansion activities of cotton development board in 131 upazilas of 39 districts of the country. Expansion activities are being implemented. Cotton production and processing has huge employment potential in the country. Besides providing cotton fiber as raw material for cotton plantation, textile industry is playing an effective role in food security of small and marginal farmers.

From cotton seed sowing to seed cotton processing, employment opportunities are created for women workers. 40 percent fiber and 60 percent seed are obtained from seed cotton produced. Again 15 percent edible oil and 85 percent oil are obtained from the seeds. Cotton husks are used as fish and animal feed. In the financial year 2021-22, more than 700 tons of edible oil and more than 3 thousand tons of oil have been produced. A high-capacity machine has been installed at the headquarters of the Cotton Development Board for checking the quality of cotton. On the advice of Cotton Development Board, a cotton oil refinery factory has been set up by private enterprise in Kushtia. Edible oil is being produced from the factory. Cotton Development Board has been implementing research program since 1991. The main objectives of cotton research

are to develop short-term high-yielding and hybrid varieties with fiber of desired qualities, to develop agronomic management techniques to increase productivity, to improve soil fertility through integrated management of organic and inorganic fertilizers, to evaluate organic pesticides for controlling harmful insects of cotton and to manage cotton diseases. In addition, research on resilience in combination with traditional knowledge and bio-technologies to expand cotton cultivation in hilly, pasture, saline and drought-prone areas. From cotton production to ginning, oil and Khail (Oil-cake) marketing, employment opportunities are created for a wide range of people including women. Cotton plant is also used as a medium for mushroom production. In the leading cotton producing countries, cotton plants are being used to make particle board. According to the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), the country's annual yarn spinning and cloth production capacity is 33 billion kg and 78 billion meters respectively. Bangladesh annually produces 1.15 million bales of unginned cotton. Has the ability to use. But currently 85 lakh bales of cotton are being used.

The garment industry has developed in Bangladesh. The export sector of the country is based on the garment industry. Its main material is cloth. Therefore, the demand for clothes is increasing gradually. Due to rising labor wages, environmental problems and the recent trade war with the United States, Chinese companies are withdrawing from the clothing business.

It increases the potential of Bangladeshi garments in the world market. Most of the investments are coming in the garment sector where the government is establishing economic zones. When production starts in these factories, the demand for clothes will increase.

Apart from this, as a by-product of cotton, there is a possibility of employment in the industry of making gauze, bandages, high quality paper, photo film paper etc. In one word, cotton is one of the agricultural products for food security, poverty alleviation and socio-economic development of small and marginal farmers. Through modern methods of cotton cultivation, it is possible to fulfill the cotton demand of the country and play an important role in the employment of backward women in the society and poverty alleviation.

***Writer : Economist***

***PID Feature***

# Water Management In Delta Planning

**Dr. Monirul Alam**

Bangladesh has prepared a 100-year Delta Plan-2100. There are 9 reservoirs in this plan. 25 Biodiversity Conservation Areas have been declared in the OTIG that divides Bangladesh geographically.

If we want to take Bangladesh to the ranks of developed countries, we need to protect rivers and wetlands by prioritizing delta planning. Advanced technology should be used to protect rivers. In cases where rivers and water bodies are being filled and cannot be freed from encroachment, all levels must come together and the government must take swift action. Technology-based river information systems are not developed in Bangladesh, such as how many rivers there are in the border, past and present status of the rivers. If it is possible to improve the information system of the river, it is possible to bring people, water body and nature together. Every six months or a year, an app or a database containing the information of the river should be created through satellite images, from which the past and present condition of the river can be known and the general public can participate. Can and easily identify problems. Then the government can easily take steps to protect rivers and aquifers and the delta plan can be successfully implemented and economic development will be possible. Waterlands and rivers are a major source of fresh water. Water for daily use of the city, water for agriculture and industrial production is taken from aquifers and rivers. Water bodies and rivers are being polluted through various human activities. Water security and sustainable development goals are threatened by water pollution. Various water borne diseases spread through water pollution. Contaminated water contains various harmful substances, chemicals, heavy metals (arsenic, lead, mercury, etc.). Because of this, using contaminated water can cause serious diseases including cancer. Vulnerable groups, especially pregnant mothers, newborns, children under five years are at higher risk. This increases healthcare costs for the poor and marginalized, reduces their working hours, and increases poverty. Excessive uses of pesticides during cultivation, industrial effluents are constantly mixing with water and polluting the soil and water. It reduces soil fertility, disrupts crop production and industrial production due to use of polluted water, which affects economic development. Polluted water infested with pesticides damages women's physical characteristics and hormone-sensitive tissues. It also increases the risk of breast cancer. People working in factories and people living in or around industrial areas are at high

risk due to excess carbon emissions in industrial areas. Due to excess carbon emissions, the temperature of the environment is increasing. Because of this, if the sea level rises, coastal marginal communities, sailors, fishermen, farmers are affected. Pesticides are spread with rain, increasing water pollution by spreading pollutants through excess storms and rain. Water pollution threatens the life of aquatic species. Pollution is spreading from reservoirs to canals, rivers, and seas through flow. It is becoming impossible for the animals there to survive. If water pollution is not prevented, aquatic species will disappear.

Water pollution of wetlands and rivers is a challenge today. Water pollution is not only a threat to human health and the environment, but also to economic prosperity and social progress. Sustainable development goals cannot be achieved unless water pollution is prevented. To prevent water pollution, the source and cause of pollution must be identified first. Excessive use of pesticides on land should be prevented, toxic and harmful chemicals should be disposed of in specific places and proper measures should be taken for industrial waste. Water pollution can be prevented by setting up treatment plants in every factory, providing safe sanitation, systematic urban planning, above all by taking appropriate measures. People's active participation should be ensured in combating water pollution, all public and private institutions should work together. Only then will it be possible to realize the Sustainable Development Goals.

Three-quarters of the world's drinking water is in poor condition due to increasing levels of water pollution. The way water is being polluted due to various reasons, even if it is possible to turn water from polluted state to pure state, many considerations and questions remain. The amount of water we are polluting, can we purify that amount of water? Even if the water can be purified, the cost of doing so, can everyone afford it? How much will we buy water in the future?

From the point of responsibility and reality of water pollution, various steps have been taken to depollute the water, but some errors still remain. One of the shortcomings is non-treatment of industrial effluents and water, inefficiency of a large part of those involved in the treatment work and lack of knowledge about the proper quality of water ingredients and components. Human household waste, industrial waste, various chemicals, solid materials, pesticides, fertilizers are polluting the water of reservoirs, rivers, canals, rivers. Again, people are using the reservoir and river water in different ways. Reservoir and river water is purified and made suitable for use at various stages. Chlorine, a disinfectant chemical, is added to water to preserve water for consumption by removing potential pathogens or microorganisms such

as viruses, bacteria including *Escherichia coli*, *Campylobacter*, *Shigella* etc. Water is made suitable for consumption by purification, maintaining a standard standard of water constituents in the world and in Bangladesh. In the case of waste water, the World Health Organization has specified the standards for water parameters, the Department of Environment, Government of Bangladesh has set standard standards for some water components in many cases.

Bangladesh is not able to progress in the way that global environment is being given importance. Still many parameters levels are not compatible with international standards. For example, the level of nitrogen after wastewater treatment is set at 30 ppm internationally, while the standard level in Bangladesh is 150 ppm. Treatment plant should be made mandatory in every industrial plant. Before releasing the waste water into the wetlands, the parameters should be checked and treated properly. The authorities have to ensure on-site supervision from time to time. If water pollution can be prevented, it will be possible to protect rivers, wetlands and biodiversity.

***Writer : Educationist***

# Climate Resilient Agriculture and Sustainable Nutrition

**Dr. Ikhtiyar Uddin**

Climate is ever changing. Our climate is constantly changing. Climate is a long term issue. Changes occur in 20-30 years. Climate-resilient agriculture is the method of increasing agricultural production to cope with the harmful effects of this climate change. Climate-tolerant agriculture is now practiced in many countries around the world. Climate-resilient agriculture is especially important in countries like ours that are vulnerable to climate change. Its main objective is to ensure food security and development of food safety. At the same time, climate-resilient agriculture helps in achieving favorable environment, economic growth and social equity.

We are born or live in a geographical location that is blessed in many ways but cursed in terms of climate change. But we are more blessed than other countries in the world. Bangladesh has done and is doing a lot to adapt to climate change. Various types of work are being done especially at personal, family and state level. Bangladesh is considered number one in adapting to climate change in Asian continent as well as in different platforms of the world. This is the contribution of our common people. However, the government is making policies, creating an enabling environment and having various types of plans or strategic plans. It proves how active our government is to work in this field. From the state level to the very grassroots level and every program be it education, health or agriculture everyone is being encouraged to focus on climate change issue.

Climate change threatens the livelihoods and equity of fragile economies like ours, large populations especially coastal communities, rural and poor people. Climate-resilient agriculture ensures food and nutrition security by increasing production and also helps increase the financial income of vulnerable populations. In addition, climate-resilient agriculture helps to address climate-related fragility and ensure sustainable livelihoods for rural communities. Through this the practice of climate-tolerant agriculture is being increased by encouraging the people of rural communities. Efforts are being made to explain to the public how it supports nutrition, how it contributes to nutritional security. Suitable fertilizers, seeds, pesticides are needed for this climate-tolerant

agriculture. The main supplier of these is the private sector. However, there is hope that the families at risk of climate change have mastered climate-tolerant agriculture through the coordinated efforts of all public and private sectors. They themselves are now cultivating it. Seeing them, the people around are gradually getting excited. This information is being conveyed to the families involved in agriculture which are at risk of climate change. Just as nutritional needs must be ascertained, so must information. Information about when new seeds are coming, how to market them should be conveyed to the farmers. All concerned authorities are now trying to ensure that they get the right information at the right time.

Community support groups are playing a very important role in imparting various important agricultural information to the farmers. In addition to providing information on community clinic services, community support groups are helping farmers connect with various government and private service providers, as a result of which farmers know what kind of crops to grow at what time, what kind of inputs are needed to produce good crops. Apart from this, the institutions are also getting field level support in crop production.

Nutrition is not a single structure. It is a multifaceted subject. In fact, nutrition is not possible without food. Food and agriculture are inextricably linked. Along with nutrition, safe agriculture also needs to be taken into consideration. If food production is disrupted, food supply is not possible. Disasters or climate change are directly related to food production. If food production is not sustainable, there will be no consistency. Again, not only food should be available, its price should also be under control. Almost hundred percent of food in Bangladesh comes from agriculture. If agriculture cannot adapt to climate change, food production conditions will deteriorate. Production must be increased by adapting agriculture to climate with nutrition in mind. There are special programs for this. Through this program, the work has started from the school level. From there it is taken to the village level and finally to the family level. A community movement is being created through this. It is necessary to explain why a vegetable is needed from the school level. Those works are being done through this program. Men and women are making the gardens at the village level. They are trying to adapt to climate change. We know that the weather in North Bengal is very disaster prone. Winter fog, flash flood, there is no disaster that is not in North Bengal. But keeping in mind the weather, the parents have made a garden of beautiful vegetables and fruits. It will fix our nutrition. The government is working on how to disseminate this education,

this experience and knowledge, this achievement at the national level. Nutrition is a long term influence. Nutritional results are not achieved in a day. We do not have a food security crisis. However, there is a deficiency in nutritional security. The government is implementing various schemes to ensure nutritional security. We are self-sufficient in paddy production, but our dependence on rice is decreasing day by day. Therefore, considering the issue of nutritious food, the government is giving importance to ensuring nutrition for the poor people. The Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 will not be met if the nutrition of the poor is not ensured. However, there is hope that Bangladesh is on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

There are some government and private projects that are directly related to agriculture. One such project is the Nutrient Gardening Project on Fallen Land. It is a farmer friendly sustainable project. Here farmers are getting technology very easily. If they want, they can plant in the yard, which was previously fallow. The Honorable Prime Minister has already called on everyone to ensure that there is no fallow land and that all land is brought under cultivation. Seed is a big factor in any crop production field. Some of those varieties may be saline tolerant, some may be drought tolerant, some may be flood tolerant. Our scientists are working on these varieties. If it can adapt to the environment, it will be possible to improve and enrich agriculture and ensure nutritional security as well.

BADC is the biggest seed company in Bangladesh. BADC can supply 25 percent of the seed requirement. However, BADC has several schemes for seed storage, production and seed distribution to farmers for each crop. Through these projects, farmers are trained on how to produce, store and distribute seeds.

It is possible to transform Bangladesh into one of the most tolerant and developed countries in the world by ensuring climate tolerant agriculture, sustainable nutrition and social security. For this, all concerned should work through coordination to see the challenges as opportunities and turn them into opportunities. Through this, it will be ensured that our motherland is free from hunger and poverty.

***Writer: Researcher and Educator***

***PID Feature***

# A Country Without Poverty

**Sadman Hossain**

At the time of Bangladesh's independence, the poverty rate was 80 percent. And according to BBS calculations in 2022, the general poverty rate of Bangladesh is 18.7 percent and the extreme poverty rate is 5.6 percent. Our progress against poverty has surprised the world. Bangladesh is now a role model for the world in poverty alleviation. Keeping this progress in poverty alleviation, the government has set a target of making Bangladesh poverty-free by 2041. Vision 2041, set by the government, aims to eradicate extreme poverty (less than 3%) by 2031 and elevate Bangladesh to a high-income country by 2041, with poverty at its lowest (less than 5%). The government aims that by 2041, all working citizens will be able to maintain a minimum standard of living with the income they receive from their employment, and that those who cannot participate in the labor market due to old age or physical incapacity will be brought under the social safety net. Adequate funds will be provided by the government for the purchase of materials required to maintain the minimum standards. The challenges in achieving this are vast and the risks are many.

Rural and urban poverty is decreasing rapidly in our country. Extreme poverty is decreasing more rapidly than general poverty. However, poverty is still higher in the south-western region than in the eastern region of the country. The rate of poverty reduction in Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions is low. Dhaka and Chattogram infrastructural development, movement of labor and goods, health and education opportunities are much higher than other regions of the country, so the poverty rate is low here. The number of households benefiting from foreign remittances is also high. At the national level, rural-to-urban migration within the country helps alleviate poverty. This creates job opportunities for immigrants and more income opportunities. However, due to unplanned urbanization, the capital Dhaka and its surrounding districts, especially Narayanganj, Gazipur and Narsingdi, have been under pressure. There are other infrastructure issues including housing, transport, water supply, sanitation and sewage. The government is already taking the necessary measures to alleviate poverty. It has not been possible to develop urban services in the cities of the western region. Padma Bridge is one such strategic investment that is accelerating development and will play an important role in alleviating poverty in the region along with creating employment. The government has planned to send one thousand workers abroad from each upazila per

year, considering the development of all regions of the country. Thus, the flow of remittances will spread to all regions of the country. The number of families receiving remittance benefits will increase, which will play an important role in poverty alleviation. In the last five decades, 1.3 million workers have gone abroad from Bangladesh. Most of them are from the eastern part of the country.

Climate change and natural disasters have a negative impact on poverty. Poverty rates are higher in districts affected by climate change and disaster prone districts. The people of these districts are deprived of the opportunity to participate in the labor market due to lack of education, training and information. Also, it is not possible for the people of these districts to carry out the high cost of migration. As a result, the desired level of poverty alleviation is hindered. Most of the country's 15 poorest districts are vulnerable to climate change, including deforestation and river erosion. Employment in agriculture is decreasing day by day. Here, technological progress and mechanization are increasing production, reducing costs. On the other hand, real wages in agriculture are increasing which is playing an important role in poverty alleviation. Increasing off-farm alternative employment and income is increasing rural income, which is playing a significant role in improving the quality of life of the poor. The garment sector is playing an important role in poverty alleviation. Some other such labor intensive manufacturing sectors are playing an important role in poverty alleviation. Skilled manpower in these sectors needs to keep pace with changing technology and employment structures. For this, the necessary skills must be mastered. The most difficult will be to turn the poor population into human resources. The government has already taken necessary steps to extend the benefits of the city to the villages. The government has given highest priority to ensure balanced development of the country. Special importance is being given for the development of the regions which are lagging behind due to geographical location and environment of the country. Efforts are being made to alleviate poverty by creating employment through infrastructural development and elimination of labour-intensive industries. Attention is being given to ensure that marginalized people do not get caught in the trap of poverty. Necessary steps are being taken to combat income inequality. It is an ongoing and long-term process. The government has special plans to improve the quality of life of the marginalized communities of hill districts, Hijra communities, ethnic minorities, disabled people, sex workers, street children, Vedic communities, slum dwellers etc. who are outside the mainstream. In past plans, the development of the most vulnerable sections of the society was looked at from the perspective of social protection. In Vision 2041, no one will be left behind to achieve

prosperity, everyone must move forward. By 2041, Bangladesh will be a developed country, with a per capita income of more than \$12,500. Bangladesh will be a golden Bangladesh, where poverty will be a thing of the distant past. And the people will be the beneficiaries and they will be the main driving force of the growth and transformation process.

The current government is working towards building a developed and prosperous Bangladesh free from hunger and poverty. Bangabandhu's dream was that the country would be self-reliant. People's education, nutrition, employment and housing will be guaranteed. The country is now on its way. Having successfully overcome a critical period of the Covid-19 global epidemic, Bangladesh is moving forward to achieve its goals according to its own plan. Bangladesh will be a poverty-free country in 2041, Bangladesh is moving forward with this goal.

***Writer : Development Worker***

PID Feature

## **Public Diplomacy – A Specialized Dimension In Diplomacy**

**Sakib Faisal**

The term ‘diplomacy’ generally connotes an idea where the government, government officials or its representatives of one country formally communicate, exchange ideas, deal with matters of national or international interest, perform important functions of mutual benefit with the equivalent body of another country or international organization or its members. Such activities are termed as ‘Traditional Diplomacy’ or ‘Elite Diplomacy’. In the modern world, when there is a wind of change in all sectors, new dimensions of diplomacy are also being explored; as a result of which ‘diplomacy’ is no longer confined to the files and official letters of the foreign office of any country. Especially in democratic countries where the power of the people is widely recognized and people’s representatives are the policy makers, there is no opportunity to deny the influence of ‘people’ or ‘public’ in any issue. From this, the concept of ‘public diplomacy’ has originated.

Let’s discuss what public diplomacy means. As the word implies, involvement of common people in diplomatic activities is, in a word, public diplomacy. It shifts the foreign policy issues from the official documents and formal letters to the tea-table discussions and the thought process of common people, which practices the citizens’ influence in shaping a country’s foreign policy or stance. As a result, on the one hand, it is possible to convey various foreign policies of the government to the voters or citizens; on the other hand, the government also gets to know the citizens’ opinion from time to time. The way of protecting public interest or implementing the agenda of the elected government have been widening through these activities. In addition to strengthening public support for various measures taken by the government on foreign affairs, the government is able to take into account their objections on specific issues. Another aspect of this is to influence the opinions and thoughts of common people of outer world or global citizens for the benefit, welfare or progress of a country. In current age of readily available information and unfettered means of expression, the concept of public diplomacy can be called the democratization and modernization of diplomacy. Any initiative for public engagement in diplomacy can be defined as ‘public diplomacy’. As such, engaging the citizens as well as

the expatriates through publicity initiatives, student exchange programs, organizing cultural events and cultural exchange, facilitating of learning foreign language, inviting and hosting foreign media personnel or eminent people, programs on diplomacy in radio-television-internet, positive branding – all are parts of public diplomacy.

It would be a mistake to consider public diplomacy as an ultra-modern theory. During ancient period, when king of one state went to war against another, it was also a strategy of public diplomacy to turn the common people of the country against the enemy state or king. The term ‘public diplomacy’ probably was first used in the London Times in 1856. American diplomat Edward Galleon used this term in his write-up in 1860. In the 1950s, the European Coal and Steel Community (which later became the European Union) successfully applied the concept of ‘public diplomacy’ to bind the economies of Europe as a whole and unite Europeans for this purpose. It was also used during the US-Soviet Cold War to garner support from the people on the respective sides. The application of public diplomacy had directly contributed to our great liberation war. The brutality of the occupying forces and the basis and ideals of our liberation struggle was highlighted to the Bengalis in UK, USA and other parts of the world. These expatriate Bengalis have inspired conscious freedom-seeking people in different parts of the world to raise a strong voice in favor of the liberation of Bangladesh and the oppressed Bengalis. As proof of this we see initiatives like George Harrison and Ravi Shankar concerts. In those times when communication was very limited without internet, such ‘public diplomacy’ related initiatives of Bangladeshi diplomats and expatriate Bangladeshis were really praiseworthy.

Hence, are the days of ‘elite diplomacy’ or ‘professional diplomacy’ coming to an end? Not at all. Rather, public diplomacy is adding new dimensions to strengthen a strategic field like diplomacy. Diplomacy is considered as unarmed strategic battle. The mark of a skilled diplomat is to employ all means or tactics possible or practicable in this field. In this age of readily available internet facility, when people are getting all the information on their screens, when strong public opinion in favor of strengthening democracy is being developed in every country, the people-oriented government are giving priority to public opinion in its policy-making. The citizens should be given the impression that there is transparency between the government and them to promote the interests of the country on the multilateral platform and their views are being considered in all matters.

Broadly, the field of public diplomacy can be divided into two parts –

internal and external. Within the country, public diplomacy is primarily focused on the citizens or voters of the country. Newspapers, TV channels, online media, social media act as connectors in this case. Ensuring good governance or the right to information by regularly informing the public about diplomatic issues is a hallmark of a democratic government. In this case, there are basically three stakeholders – the government (mainly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the media and the people; and the role of each of them is significant. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will explain the actions and position of the government, the media will convey the statement of the Ministry objectively to the people, and the people will utilize their own wit for rational criticism. The entire system will be weakened if one party does not responsibly perform its part. The part of public diplomacy in the outer world is focused at the citizens of other countries (apart from the government). Here, the role of the international media and the Embassy of a country in abroad is vital. News and factual information in international media and Embassies in abroad through various promotional activities (books translated into foreign languages, documentaries in foreign languages, various socio-cultural events, branding) can positively engage global citizens with that country.

With a view to building a modern smart Bangladesh and to bring dynamism in the field of diplomacy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bangladesh has put emphasis on public diplomacy. The Public Diplomacy Wing of this Ministry is working relentlessly to convey the actions of the government to the people.

*Writer : Govt. Officer*

*PID Feature*

# Smart Society: Paperless Office and Public Services Revolution in Bangladesh

**A H M Masum Billah**

In an era where technology has become the cornerstone of progress, Bangladesh's visionary government is steadfastly steering the nation towards a future defined by innovation and efficiency. With the ambitious goal of building a Smart Bangladesh by 2041, powered by Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the country is embracing a holistic approach that encompasses Smart Citizen, Smart Economy, Smart Government, and Smart Society. Among these dimensions, the pursuit of a paperless office and public services stands out as a testament to the government's commitment to digital transformation.

The digital revolution in Bangladesh has been a journey of deliberate steps, each contributing to the grand vision of a digitally empowered nation. The electronic file management system (e-nothi) in government offices marks an initial stride towards a paperless office ecosystem. This system not only streamlined bureaucratic processes but also significantly reduced paperwork, leading to increased efficiency and transparency. Recognizing the need for continuous evolution, the government introduced the Digital Nothi System (D-nothi), taking the digital transformation to the next level. This advanced system not only maintains e-documents but also facilitates seamless communication between government entities, further enhancing collaboration and effectiveness.

Bangladesh's success in realizing a paperless office and public services can be seen as a culmination of the nation's journey towards becoming a Smart Nation. The government's foresight, in tandem with its commitment to technological adoption, has positioned the country as a beacon of digital transformation. While Digital Bangladesh laid the groundwork, Smart Bangladesh envisions a future where technology is harnessed across all sectors to achieve unprecedented heights of efficiency, inclusivity, and sustainability.

As smartphone usage continues to soar in Bangladesh, the nation finds itself on the cusp of a paradigm shift. The rise of smartphone users is an evidence to the increasing accessibility of technology, and it aligns seamlessly with the Smart Citizen dimension. Smartphones empower citizens by placing a world of information, services, and opportunities at

their fingertips. This digital inclusion is a key element of Bangladesh's success in creating a paperless society, as citizens can now interact with government services and access vital information with great convenience.

The internet penetration of 12.61 crore users, as reported by the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), is a clear indication of the nation's readiness for smart transformation. The government's emphasis on paperless office and public services resonates with a population that is increasingly digitally connected. The internet serves as the bridge that connects citizens with government initiatives, streamlining communication, fostering transparency, and enhancing citizen engagement.

The mobile phone revolution in Bangladesh, with a staggering 18.38 crore mobile phone customers, has been a driving force behind the nation's journey towards Smart Society. Mobile phones are not only communication tools but also gateways to a world of possibilities. Integrating paperless office solutions has the potential to equalize access to information, services, and opportunities, transcending traditional geographical and socioeconomic constraints. This transformative influence is essential for Bangladesh's achievement in effectively implementing paperless systems and extending their reach to all sectors of society. This inclusive approach not only represents advancement but also underscores the nation's dedication to ensuring that the advantages of technological progress are equitably distributed among all citizens, regardless of their background or circumstances.

The integration of paperless office solutions, fostering equal access and transcending barriers, is vital for Bangladesh's commitment to achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. This commitment serves as a testament to the nation's dedication to positive change and progress. As Bangladesh navigates its transformative journey, the resonating harmony between its objectives and the global sustainability agenda becomes increasingly evident. A pivotal dimension of this transformation lies in the seamless alignment of Bangladesh's endeavors with SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production.

This environmental commitment is fortified by Bangladesh's comprehensive legal framework and policies, which are designed to safeguard natural resources and champion planned development initiatives. One noteworthy measure taken is the halt on cutting trees from conserved and natural forest areas from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2030, a strategic decision aimed at preserving the nation's rich biodiversity. Simultaneously, a focus on social forest trees permits

sustainable resource management while supporting local communities.

The government's unwavering dedication to restoring and conserving forest lands through the removal of illegal encroachments exemplifies its proactive stance in nurturing the environment. Notably, the management of tree resources in the Sundarbans – a unique and ecologically crucial region – has witnessed significant improvement. This collective effort has culminated in an enhanced tree cover, with 22.37 percent of the country's total area now enveloped by trees. Looking forward, the government's ambition aims to surpass this figure, targeting a tree cover exceeding 24 percent by 2025.

A tangible testament to these endeavors lies in the data derived from the 2019 National Forest Survey. This survey reveals that the total carbon stock within the Sundarbans ecosystem stands at a substantial 139 million tonnes. This value starkly contrasts with the 107 million tonnes recorded in the previous survey conducted in 2009. This notable increase in carbon stock underlines the efficacy of Bangladesh's multifaceted strategies to enhance environmental sustainability and preserve vital ecosystems.

The implications of this shift extend far beyond the digitization of administrative processes. They encompass a profound commitment to minimizing the ecological footprint associated with paper production and waste generation. The considerable reduction in paper usage translates to decreased deforestation, a critical step in conserving biodiversity and combating climate change. Furthermore, the integration of digital solutions not only enhances efficiency but also underscores Bangladesh's endeavor to forge a sustainable future, where technology coexists harmoniously with nature.

As the nation forges ahead, guided by its vision of a Smart Bangladesh by 2041, its dedication to responsible consumption and production remains steadfast. The journey is marked by a dynamic interplay of technological innovation, economic advancement, and environmental stewardship. The concerted efforts to embrace paperless systems reflect not only the nation's preparedness for a digital future but also its unwavering commitment to a sustainable present.

Bangladesh's remarkable journey towards a paperless office and public services is a testament to the government's unwavering dedication to progress, innovation, and inclusivity. From the initial steps of digitalization to the establishment of sophisticated systems like the Digital Nothi System (D-nothi), the government has demonstrated its commitment to transforming the nation into a digitally empowered

society. The convergence of smartphone proliferation, widespread internet connectivity, and a burgeoning mobile revolution has created the ideal environment for a digital transformation that aligns with the Smart Bangladesh vision. As the government continues to champion technological innovation and digital accessibility, Bangladesh stands poised to realize its grand vision of a Smart Society by 2041. This journey not only highlights the government's successes but also serves as an inspiring example for nations around the world on how digitalization can truly transform societies and pave the way for a brighter future.

*Writer: DPIO, PID*

*PID Feature*

# Bangladesh's Progress In Implementing SDGs

**Dr. Mahamud Sattar**

Bangladesh gained membership of important international organizations immediately after independence under the visionary leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the great architect of independent Bangladesh and the greatest Bengali father of the nation. The most significant of these is Bangladesh's membership of the United Nations as the 136th country on September 17, 1974, with the unwavering support of the world. Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the blessed daughter of the Father of the Nation, has taken the leadership of Bangladesh to a new height in the United Nations following his footsteps. He is the only Prime Minister in the world who has simultaneously signed the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on behalf of his country.

The concept of Sustainable Development Goals was originally conceived to achieve the achievements that remained elusive in the Millennium Development Goals. Considering the incompleteness of the MDG and the need for sustainable development, in 2011-12, the United Nations invited proposals on sustainable development from various countries, international and regional organizations and individuals. Accordingly, a proposal was submitted from the Government of Bangladesh and a proposal from the private sector as well (PKSF, 2021). In June 2012, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. There, consensus was established based on extensive discussions and debates with heads of government, civil society, business and development partners on a new set of goals for global development. On the basis of the said consensus, the working group was formed to prepare a draft proposal for sustainable development by reviewing the proposals received on sustainable development. Bangladesh was also a member of the said working group. After lengthy discussions and reviews, the draft recommendations for sustainable development were finalized. In the inaugural Declaration of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, world leaders declared: "As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge to leave no one behind. Upholding human dignity is our fundamental responsibility, we want to see that the goals and objectives are achieved equally for all races and peoples and all sections of society and we will try to reach the most disadvantaged groups first". Consequently, in an effort to move the world towards sustainable achievement, on September 25, 2015, the United Nations General

Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2030, in the presence of 193 heads of state. It is also known as Agenda 2030. The SDGs rest on three pillars – economic, social and environmental, so that development is sustainable, inclusive and holistic. In formulating this global agenda, Bangladesh proposed 11 goals out of which 10 goals are specific and 1 goal is reflected in other goals. 17 goals, 169 targets and 231 indicators were set by the United Nations for the development agenda. Right after the announcement, Bangladesh took comprehensive activities to implement the SDGs under the guidance of the Honorable Prime Minister.

The greatest Bengali of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave the outline of sustainable development in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly in 1974, it has been exactly reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 declared by the United Nations after 40 years. The master plan adopted by the government to build the ‘Golden Bangladesh’ of the Father of the Nation includes every aspect of the Global Development Agenda 2030 announced by the United Nations.

The long, medium and short term plans adopted by the government for the development of Bangladesh and the improvement of people’s quality of life, all the elements to achieve the goals of SDG exist in the proper implementation of all those plans. However, Bangladesh is making detailed plans to achieve the SDG targets more closely and implementing them. Bangladesh has already achieved international recognition in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Since its inception, Governance Innovation Unit (GIU) has been involved in the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 implementation plan and the determination of implementation strategies. GIU has very efficiently performed tasks such as capacity building through training of government officials at home and abroad on SDG implementation and setting national priorities of SDG targets and indicators in view of the socio-economic reality of Bangladesh. However, the proper implementation of the SDGs requires planning and implementation strategies at the local level, as well as the direct participation of local people and local institutions. In view of the above facts, GIU proposed 39+1 model of localization after identifying 39 priority indicators at the national level with an additional 1 indicator proposed at the local level which was approved by the Cabinet. Bangladesh is formulating and implementing SDG implementation strategy in the light of national 39 priority indicators. SDG is a “Whole of Society Approach”.As it is necessary to involve all the members of the society in this process,

it is very important to involve the local public and local institutions. In identifying the +1 local priorities under the 39+1 model, GIU has followed the innovative method of “Whole of Society Approach” involving local public, public representatives, representatives of civil society, representatives of business and social organizations, mass media representatives, government and private officials, which is undoubtedly appreciated demands. The SDG local indicators prepared through the participation of people at all levels are playing an important role in the integrated development program of Bangladesh.

The strategy followed by the Governance Innovation Unit to identify priority indicators at the division, district and upazila levels involving the local public, public representatives, representatives of civil society, representatives of social and cultural organizations, business and media representatives and local government and non-governmental officials is a universal SDG localization Ideal model. However, a more universal SDG localization model can be incorporated into the development plan by identifying overall development priorities or objective priorities rather than identifying a priority. The Hon’ble Prime Minister’s development philosophy is reflected in the ‘Sustainable Development Goals 2030’. In the development philosophy of the Honorable Prime Minister, as the poor, helpless, marginalized and marginalized people have been given priority to improve their quality of life, the United Nations has pledged to build a world free of hunger and poverty through the United Nations ‘Sustainable Development Goals 2030’.

The government is working tirelessly to create Bangladesh free from hunger and poverty, which is actually the main theme of SDG-1 and SDG-2. The main target of the development agenda of the honorable Prime Minister is the people, so are the SDGs. Governments have incorporated the framework provided in the SDGs into their own development agenda to address the challenges of social inclusion, economic development and environmental protection. One of its objectives is to fulfill global commitments by implementing its own plans. To meet the aspirations of the Sustainable Development Goals, the government has already taken special programs for the homeless and landless, marginalized communities, remote areas and those living in vulnerable situations. Bangladesh became the first country to make the best SDG progress between 2015 and 2020, thus the Honorable Prime Minister was awarded the “SDG Progress Award” at the 9th International Conference on Sustainable Development in September 2021. As a result, along with international recognition, the image of Bangladesh in the world also increases.

Ambitious targets like SDG are being implemented at the state level by identifying the correct and effective priorities considering the reality of the country. Bangladesh has identified priority indicators in such a way that if they can be implemented, many global indicators will also be implemented along with the priority indicators. Taken as a whole, the new indicators reveal Bangladesh's own priorities as well as global targets on sustainable agriculture, reducing inequality, quality education, gender equality, climate change. Although the achievement of SDG nationally is promising, Bangladesh is lagging behind in localization. If SDG localization does not proceed as planned, it may not be possible to achieve all targets of SDG in the stipulated time. But for an effective SDG localization model, in the light of global 231 indicators and national 39 priorities, an overall priority indicator list is needed at each local district and upazila level, as well as a proper action plan with resources to implement those indicators. However, currently steps are being taken to implement the priority indicators that have been identified. Implementation of the priorities received at the district and upazila levels will gain recognition among grassroots stakeholders for their participation in government planning, and the local people will also benefit.

***Writer: Economist***

# Smart Bangladesh Is Based on Pm's 10 Initiatives

**Dr. Nahid Karim Khan**

The government has successfully implemented Vision 2021 under the dynamic leadership of the Prime Minister and is now implementing Vision 2041 with the conviction of building a golden Bangla of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's dream. Through this, Bangladesh is moving ahead with the unstoppable progress towards becoming a knowledge-based society and a developed country by 2041. After the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the country is moving towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. After the formation of the government in 2009, Bangabandhu's daughter Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina undertook 10 special initiatives to ensure the fundamental rights of all people of the country. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's 10 special initiatives are - Ekti Bari, Ekti Khamar (currently Amar Bari Amar Khamar), Asrayan Prokalpo, Digital Bangladesh, Education Assistance, Women Empowerment, Electricity For All, Community Clinic, Social Safety Program,, Investment Development and Environment Protection. The initiatives are playing a special role in improving the quality of life of the people. These 10 special initiatives have also been included in the Eighth Five Year Plan to improve the quality of life of people.

**Amar Bari Amar Khamar:** The project Ekti Bari, Ekti Khamar (Palli Sanchay Bank )was approved in November 2009 for implementation from July 2009 to June 2014. Ekti Bari, Ekti Khamar project was later named Amar Bari Amar Khamar. Based on the initial survey the poor people in the villages, providing various skill building training, loans, grants and technical assistance to the members, along with distribution of dairy cows, fish, poultry and crop seeds among the poor.

**Asrayan Prokalpo:** Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman launched the homeless rehabilitation program in 1972. Following in the footsteps of Bangabandhu, his daughter Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took the initiative to give ownership of houses and land to the homeless and landless through the Asryan scheme in 1997. Ownership of land is given to both husband and wife and registration and mutation of land is also given in the name of both husband and wife. A total of 8 lakh 29 thousand 607 families have been resettled since 1997

under the Asrayan Prokalpo.

**Digital Bangladesh:** Bangladesh has achieved a revolution in the spread of modern information technology through the implementation of Digital Bangladesh . More than 16 thousand entrepreneurs are currently working in about 8 thousand 800 digital centers across the country to deliver services to people's doorsteps, where 50 percent are women entrepreneurs. So far citizens have received more than 80 crore services from the digital center. As a result, citizens have been able to save more or less 78.14 percent working hours, 16.55 percent expenses and 17.4 percent transportation. Digital Center has changed the outlook besides simplifying the standard of living of the common people. Digital services are gradually expanding across the sector. People now believe that it is possible to get all kinds of services near the house. The use of information technology is spreading at an unimaginable speed. Before 2009, no government service in Bangladesh was digital. Digital Bangladesh is no longer a dream but a reality.

**Education Assistance:** One of the steps taken by the Bangladesh government to spread education at all levels is the program of free distribution of books to 100% of the students. A stipend system has been introduced from primary to secondary level to promote women's education. The government has brought 100% children under the stipend with the aim of creating a smart generation of the future. As a result, more than 13 million children are getting free education. In 2006, the signature rate was only 45 percent and during the current government's tenure, it increased by 31.8 percent to 76.8 percent in 2023. In 2006, the primary education rate for girls was 54 percent and has increased to 98.25 percent at present. In 2006 there were only 9 technical training centers and currently there are 96 technical training centers. In order to ensure the education of poor and meritorious students who are deprived of educational facilities, the "Educational Assistance Trust Act, 2012" has been enacted and the "Educational Assistance Trust" has been formed. The main aim of the government is no student should be deprived of education due to lack of funds.

**Women Empowerment:** Bangladesh is a role model for the developing world today in women's empowerment. In recognition of this, Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was awarded the UN Women 'Planet 50:50 Champion' and the Global Partnership Forum 'Agent of Change Award-2016'. For her commitment to women's empowerment and women's education, the Prime Minister received the UNESCO 'Peace Tree' award in 2014 and was honored with the Honorable Prime Minister's Global Women's Leadership Award-2018. In terms of

women's empowerment, the position of Bangladesh is now 7th in the world. According to the latest Labor Force Survey 2022, the participation rate of women in the labor force is now close to 43 percent, up from 29 percent in 2006 and 36.3 percent in the 2017 survey. But in India this rate is only 20 percent and in Pakistan is 22 percent. The expansion of women's education has played a major role in women's empowerment in Bangladesh.

**Electricity For All :** In 2006, the power generation capacity was 3782 MW. During the current government, it has increased to 28 thousand 134 MW. At the same time, per capita electricity generation has increased from 220 KWh to 602 KWh. The number of subscribers is 4 crore 54 lakh. With honesty, courage and foresight, in just 13 years, countries with 40 percent electricity have come under 100 percent electricity.

**Community Clinic:** To ensure universal health care, the government has established more than 14 thousand community clinics to deliver health care at the doorsteps of the people. 30 types of medicines are being given free for women, children and service seekers. As a result, the average life expectancy of people has increased. In 2006 the maternal mortality rate (in lakhs) was 370 and in 2023 it has reduced to 161. In 2006, the infant mortality rate (per thousand) was 84 and under the current government, it has reduced by four times to 21 in 2023. All this has become possible due to bringing healthcare to people's doorsteps.

**Social Safety Program :** The main goal of the government is to build a social security system by providing special benefits to the helpless and backward people of the society. The government has allocated Tk 1 lakh 26 thousand 272 crore for this sector in the budget of the financial year 2023-24 which is 11 percent more than the last financial year. More or less one-third of the people of the country have come under the social security system.

**Investment Development:** In the ease of doing business index, the position of Bangladesh is 168th among 190 countries in the world as of 2022, which was 176th in 2021, that is, Bangladesh has advanced eight steps in this index. Every year the World Bank determines how difficult or easy it is to do business in a country. World Bank prepares this index every year based on 10 sectors. As a result of the development of the index, the amount of investment will increase, the standard of living of the people will increase, so Bangladesh is working for this purpose to provide the highest service to the investors in the development of Bangladesh.

**Environment Protection:** Water pollution, air pollution, control

of noise pollution, prevention of land degradation, management of environmentally sensitive areas and climate change impact and weight level protection and mitigation of environmental pollution problems . Government is implementing Plastic Action Plan 2030 to control deadly pollution like plastic. Solid Waste Management Rules, 2021 and E-Waste Management Rules, 2021 have been issued to bring hazardous waste and chemical waste under sound management. These initiatives will play an important role in protecting the environment.

The commitment of the government to make Bangladesh a capable state is beginning to be visible. The people of the country have already started getting its long-term benefits. Developed Prosperous Bangladesh and Safe Delta Plan by 2041 has been formulated. As the first step in the journey of developed Bangladesh, Bangladesh has been promoted from a less developed country to a developing country. Bangladesh's goal now is Smart Bangladesh. By 2041, an affordable, sustainable, intelligent, knowledge-based, innovative, smart Bangladesh will be built on the four main foundations of Smart Citizen, Smart Economy, Smart Government and Smart Society.

*Writer : Economist and Consultant*

*PID Feature*

# Smart Bangladesh: Media's Role for the Vision for 2041

**A H M Masum Billah**

Bangladesh has made remarkable progress since its independence in 1971. Over the years, the nation has achieved significant milestones, transitioning into a digitally advanced state by 2021. Looking ahead to 2041, the aspiration of a Smart Bangladesh takes center stage, driven by the vision of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. This transformation hinges on technology, innovation, and inclusive development, aiming to create a multifaceted nation that benefits all. In this endeavor, the media, encompassing platforms such as TV, radio, and newspapers, holds a pivotal role. Smart Bangladesh seeks to utilize these mediums to share information, raise awareness, and foster a united effort towards this ambitious goal.

Bangladesh's journey toward becoming a Smart Bangladesh goes beyond mere digitalization. It is a comprehensive vision that encompasses economic prosperity, social equity, technological advancement, and sustainable growth. A "smart nation" harnesses emerging technologies, networks, and data to build tech-enabled solutions that contribute to nation-building.

The Smart Bangladesh vision for 2041 covers a range of important goals. These objectives encompass achieving a high-income status, which means having a GDP per person of at least \$12,500. This goal aims to improve the country's economy and raise the living standards of its people. Another key goal is to create a society without poverty. This means getting rid of extreme poverty completely and reducing overall poverty to below 3%. This shows a commitment to balanced growth and making life better for everyone.

Maintaining stable economics is a crucial part of this vision. This involves keeping inflation rates low (around 4-5%), having small deficits (only 5% of the country's economic output), increasing investment (up to 40% of the GDP), and collecting more taxes (around 20% of the GDP). These measures demonstrate a strong commitment to responsible financial management and ensuring the country's long-term economic growth.

The vision also places a strong emphasis on high human development. This entails achieving 100% high-school education, including

digital literacy, as well as establishing universal healthcare coverage, maximizing the nation's demographic potential and ensuring the holistic well-being of all citizens.

Sustainable urbanization is another critical pillar, wherein the goal is to embrace eco-friendly urban development. This involves achieving 80% urbanization and ensuring 100% electrification, primarily sourced from renewable energy, promoting environmentally conscious growth and resource utilization.

The vision's commitment to accessibility is evident in the aspiration to provide 100% paperless and cashless public services, tailor-made to individual preferences. This streamlined approach aims to facilitate efficient and convenient interactions between citizens and public services, marking a defining feature of Smart Bangladesh.

Central to the Smart Bangladesh vision is the creation of an equitable nation. This principle underscores the core goal of eliminating disparities, fostering equal rights, and creating opportunities for all segments of society, ensuring that progress is inclusive and far-reaching.

The media holds a crucial role in the transformation of Bangladesh into a smart nation. It serves as the conduit of public opinion and information dissemination, significantly shaping the trajectory of Smart Bangladesh. Here are the four core pillars of Smart Bangladesh and the ways media can contribute to their realization. In addition, in recent days, the legacy media in the country have been rattled by the onslaught of social media that tend to set the agenda of public discourse. People rely more on Facebook and YouTube for news and information than legacy media. With the absence of gate keeping, gossips and rumours about different incidents create alternative realities or truth for social media users with the manipulation of audio and video. If the legacy media have to contribute to the achievement of Vision 2041, they have to regain their credibility by practising objective journalism. They have to play the role of a watchdog and point out the successes and limitations of the development programs.

In a nation driven by technology, the media's role in shaping smart citizens is of utmost importance. As a bridge between innovation and the public, the media plays a pivotal role in disseminating information about the latest technologies and their real-world applications. Through accurate reporting and educational content, the media can equip citizens with the essential knowledge and skills to actively participate in the digital landscape. This involves championing digital literacy campaigns to ensure everyone can navigate the digital world effectively. By

showcasing success stories of individuals benefiting from technology and by facilitating public discussions on technology-related topics, the media not only informs but also empowers citizens to embrace and contribute to the ever-evolving technological realm.

In a smart government setup, transparency and accountability are vital. Here, the media functions as a vigilant watchdog, ensuring authorities remain accountable for their actions. Through impartial coverage of government initiatives, policies, and their consequences, the media can guarantee citizens are informed about the nation's status. Investigative journalism can uncover inefficiencies or corruption, compelling the authorities to adopt data-driven choices aligned with the vision of Smart Bangladesh. This media-driven accountability fosters a governance structure that resonates with the principles of progress and transparency.

With the ability to influence societal norms and values, the media holds remarkable sway. In a smart society, where inclusivity and social cohesion are crucial, the media takes center stage. It has the capacity to spotlight narratives that exemplify diversity, gender equality, and societal advancement. By showcasing grassroots initiatives, collaborative community efforts, and innovations that bridge societal divides, the media may cultivate a collective sense of unity and shared objectives among citizens. Through its storytelling prowess, the media shapes a social landscape that embraces differences, equality, and collective progress, embodying the very essence of a smart and harmonious society.

In an era of technological advancement in Bangladesh, the media emerges as an invaluable guide, navigating the intricacies of economic transformation. Through comprehensive analysis, expert insights, and tales of triumph in innovation-led economic expansion, the media plays a pivotal role in fostering citizen comprehension. By delving into the potential implications of novel technologies on industries, employment landscapes, and overall prosperity, the media equips citizens with insights to make informed decisions.

Furthermore, the media's role can extend to facilitating dialogues on the emerging technologies. This ensures a harmonious equilibrium between economic advancement and societal welfare. As an advocate for responsible growth, the media serves as a platform for discussions that promote not only financial progress but also the preservation of ethical values and the well-being of society at large. In this journey of transformation, the media's multifaceted role ensures citizens are empowered, informed, and engaged in shaping the evolving landscape of Smart Bangladesh.

The shift from Digital Bangladesh to Smart Bangladesh by 2041 is a monumental endeavor that demands the collective efforts of citizens, the government, industries, and stakeholders. In this transformative journey, the media can emerge as a linchpin, weaving together the fabric of a technology-enabled society. By empowering citizens with knowledge, holding institutions accountable, fostering inclusivity, and guiding economic progress, the media can accelerate the realization of the Smart Bangladesh vision. As the nation propels itself toward a future of innovation and equity, the media stands as a beacon of information, enlightenment, and inspiration.

*Writer: DPIO, PID*

# **Foreign Policy of Bangladesh: A Dreamin Progress**

**Dr. A K Abdul Momen**

The birth of Bangladesh was sanitized by blood and tears. Three million dead. Two hundred thousand raped. All at a time when many major powers were looking away from the carnage. Fiftythree years have passed since and what some pundits once referred to as a basket case with no hope of survival evolved into a “development miracle” and a “land of opportunity” under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the able daughter of the assassinated Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Thanks to, first, strong agricultural sector production - both extension and distribution and marketing; second, rapid expansion of RMG-led production and export; and third, impressive remittance that pulled the economy even when the global economy was facing recessions and meltdown. It is not only the three direct impetus, rather robust structural reforms – expanding and reconfiguring public sector investments into the formation of infrastructure assets; a freer and more transparent flow of remittances from a thriving expatriate community; diversification of exports – to higher-value brands and integration of essentially middleware design and software components, have contributed to Bangladesh’s journey in becoming an epic saga of determined and charismatic leadership. The Economy of the country has been growing at more than 6% a year for the last four decades and had it not been stifled by the sudden onslaught of the COVID19 paradox, it would have been lifted to an 8% paradigm starting 2020.

Foreign policy, reflecting domestic objectives, has emerged prominently amidst the post- COVID-19 crisis, as countries navigate unique challenges. Bangladesh’s foreign policy, based on “Friendship to all, malice to none” as coined by the nation’s founder, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, is anchored in its constitution’s Article 25, emphasizing national sovereignty, peaceful dispute resolution, and support for oppressed populations globally. This ethos drove Bangladesh’s early diplomatic efforts, securing global recognition and UN membership by 1974. Presently, under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the focus remains on peaceful international dispute resolution, mirroring the consistent foreign policy over nearly five decades.

Bangabandhu envisioned Bangladesh as the ‘Switzerland of the East’ in the sense that Bangladesh would act as the “safe space” or the “refuge” in the deeply divided globe. Bangabandhu believed that without peace and stability, no country can develop or prosper and therefore he wanted Bangladesh to be an ‘Island of Peace’. Therefore, Bangabandhu agreed to join the OIC Summit held in Lahore in February 1974 at the request of the high-power delegation led by Kuwait and Algeria - provided that Pakistan accepts the sovereignty of Bangladesh. His address at the UNGA in 1974 called for the sharing of technology and resources on a global scale, so that the human race could begin to enjoy at least the minimal conditions of a decent life- which is the central focus of Bangladesh’s foreign Policy (as an extension of its own domestic priorities). Till now Bangladesh’s foreign policy centers on the sharing of resources in a symbiotic and synergistic manner to create a better future for all of humanity avoiding confrontations and provocations. Despite the position of neutralities, Bangladesh extends its great heart to ease the sufferings of the persecuted people across the world. Our unwavering support to the cause of Palestine and peace in the middle east is part of its effort to stand by the side of the oppressed. Bangabandhu supported the end of apartheid in South Africa and the end of the Vietnam War to secure both the decency and dignity of human lives all over the world. Likewise, Bangladesh has sheltered 1.1 million Rohingyas from Myanmar despite its own constraints of resources. It is committed to engaging all possible diplomatic tools to raise the awareness of human conscience - for not only guaranteeing the safe and sustainable return of the Rohingya people to their motherland but also to ensure justice and accountability – so that the atrocities they suffered, just like those suffered by the Bengalis in 1971, never happen again, anywhere.

### **A Brief Overview of Current Status**

Global admiration for Bangladesh’s development strides, including poverty reduction and women empowerment, places it above regional neighbors, propelling towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals. Bilaterally, mutual respect and constructive engagement characterize Bangladesh-India relations, even amidst challenges like Teesta river water-sharing. Similarly, Bangladesh maintains strong ties with other regional and global partners, extending support during crises.

Regionally, Bangladesh has been active in various alliances and initiatives like SAARC, BIMSTEC, CVF, the D-8, and IORA, showcasing its commitment to multilateral diplomacy. In combating COVID-19, governmental policies balanced lives and livelihoods, showcasing

resilience by achieving a 6.1% growth rate in the last fiscal year despite global economic disruptions.

As a forthcoming developing country, Bangladesh eyes both opportunities and challenges, notably in trade preferences. It's proactively addressing climate change, allocating substantial funds for adaptation and mitigation while chairing forums like the Climate Vulnerable Forum.

Migration remains a focal point, with efforts to ensure safe and dignified employment for Bangladeshis abroad. The Rohingya crisis, although a formidable challenge, continues to see Bangladesh advocating for safe repatriation, yet the recent military coup in Myanmar complicates matters.

Employing soft power, Bangladesh highlights its cultural heritage, secular identity, culture of peace, and sustainable products on the global stage. Investment-friendly policies, economic zones, and high-tech parks beckon foreign investments, while efforts for export diversification are underway.

Digital advancements, propelled by a robust IT professional pool, have fortified Bangladesh's digital infrastructure, benefiting education and other sectors during the pandemic. In development, significant projects like the self-funded Padma Bridge symbolize Bangladesh's monumental progress over 50 years, testament to the nation's resilient and entrepreneurial spirit.

### **Bangladesh's Importance in Geopolitics: Geo-economics, Geo-strategy, Geo-ideology**

Bangladesh, the thriving nation on the eastern banks of the Indian subcontinent, stands as a key player in the global geopolitical realm. Rooted in a rich history and the indomitable spirit of its people, Bangladesh has emerged as a significant nation in terms of geo-economics, geo-strategy, and geo-ideology. Bangladesh navigates the intricate landscape of international relations, understanding Bangladesh's unique position in these domains is of paramount importance.

### **Geo-economics: A Hub of Connectivity and Trade**

Bangladesh's economic prowess is hard to overlook. Located between the burgeoning markets of India and Southeast Asia, it is positioned as a connector, bridging the East with the West. The nation's geo-economic significance is underpinned by its strategic location, which is instrumental for regional trade and connectivity projects like the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) corridor. Such projects promise to transform the

regional trade dynamics and place Bangladesh at the epicenter of Asian economic growth.

Furthermore, with a burgeoning garment industry that contributes massively to global supply chains, Bangladesh commands a pivotal role in international trade. The nation's ports, especially the Port of Chittagong, play a vital role in connecting the hinterlands of India, Bhutan, and Nepal to the broader world, underlining Bangladesh's geo-economic significance.

### **Geo-strategy: The Balance Between Major Powers**

Geographically, Bangladesh sits at the crossroads of South and Southeast Asia, making it a strategic pivot in the larger Indo-Pacific theater. With the increasing interest of major powers like China, the U.S., and India, Bangladesh's geopolitical weight has grown exponentially. China views Bangladesh as an integral part of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aiming to consolidate its influence in the Bay of Bengal region. On the other hand, India sees Bangladesh as a crucial ally, not only for regional stability but also as a counterbalance to China's growing influence. The U.S., under its broader Indo-Pacific strategy, views Bangladesh as a potential partner in ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific. As these major powers vie for influence, Bangladesh must astutely navigate its strategic partnerships to ensure its national interests are preserved and enhanced. What is important for us is to see that we keep our constitutional prerogative of friendship to all and malice to none at the core of our own view of the strategies which overlap on and across us.

### **Geo-ideology: A Beacon of Secularism and Democracy**

Bangladesh stands as a testament to the idea that secularism and democracy can thrive in a predominantly Muslim-majority nation. Born out of a struggle for language and cultural identity, Bangladesh's founding principles resonate with ideals of secularism, democracy, and pluralism.

In a region where radical ideologies sometimes threaten to take root, Bangladesh offers a counter-narrative. By championing the principles of democracy, inclusivity and acceptance, Bangladesh sends a strong message to neighboring countries about the viability and desirability of democratic governance. As extremist ideologies challenge the fabric of many societies, Bangladesh's commitment to secularism, justice and democracy can serve as a model for nations grappling with similar challenges.

## **Conclusion**

As we chart the nation's course in the world, recognizing Bangladesh's unique position in geo-economics, geo-strategy, and geo-ideology is crucial. By harnessing its economic potential, tactfully navigating strategic partnerships, and upholding its foundational principles, Bangladesh can not only safeguard its national interests but also shape the future geopolitical landscape of the region.

AI sunrise is on the horizon. There are already two more veritable strategic spaces which have opened up – informatics and space. Our locational triangulations and our creative minds make us potential players in both domains. Foreign Policy must take into account the emergent spaces too. We have already commenced with our #ZeroDigitalDivide campaign through the e-Quality centre and we are planning on creating integrated approaches towards ensuring economic and creative connectivity both for our individuals and our enterprises and also the global supply solutions which could optimize themselves with a connection through our people and our technical stacks – underwritten by an ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship.

In the years to come, Bangladesh's role in global geopolitics is poised to grow, propelled by its economic strides, strategic location, and unwavering commitment to democratic ideals. It is imperative that Bangladesh leverages these strengths, ensuring a prosperous and stable future for its people and cementing its position as a pivotal actor in the global geopolitical arena.

***Writer : Former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh***

# Public Hearing On Anti-Corruption

**Parvez Alam**

The United Nations initiative has adopted a universally coordinated set of programs committed to building a more sustainable and beautiful world for all people by 2030. It contains 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets. Clause 16.5 of this objective mentions “reduction of all forms of corruption and bribery”. The main responsibility of the implementation of this goal is the cabinet Division. And the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting also has a role as a supporting ministry along with other ministries. Issues of corruption or ethics change over time. At the same time, its news value to the media also changes. The Anti-Corruption Commission has taken and is taking various steps to curb corruption. Corruption will never be controlled by a specific strategy or by legislation alone. For this the strategy has to change over time. People should be involved. To control corruption, people’s mentality needs to be changed.

Anti-Corruption Commission takes various steps to control corruption in the country. Meanwhile, public hearings are organized in various government offices to make the people aware. Through public hearing it is possible to identify the transparency, accountability and weakness of the government office based services. The public hearing is essentially a stakeholders meeting. Honorable citizens from concern sectors, responsible officials in the respective government offices and senior officials of the Anti-Corruption Commission are present here.

Citizens of different sectors and professions present in these meetings presented their grievances and problems. Officials of government departments consider those issues seriously and present their views. In the presence of Anti-Corruption Commission officials, most of the problems are resolved immediately. Public hearings are being used as one of the tools to increase public awareness of transparency, accountability and anti-corruption of government officials at the local level. The commission started its first public hearing in 2014 at Muktagachha in Mymensingh. Public hearings are regularly organized by the Anti-Corruption Commission in each district.

Public hearings serve several purposes. Directly hearing the complaints of the citizens seeking service and settling them according to the rules by the concerned government department. Ensuring service delivery to people based on Citizen Charter and improving quality of service. To make the people aware about the civil rights and to identify the causes of irregularities, corruption and delays in the provision of services by the concerned offices and to take administrative and legal measures in specific cases.

Many problems are being solved immediately through public hearings. It is also becoming possible to identify sources of corruption and irregularities. There is an idea about the prevalence of corruption and irregularities in the concerned office. Apart from this, an idea is also obtained about how much the people are aware about the services of the concerned government department. By reviewing the overall issues, effective anti-corruption strategies can be determined. By doing this it is possible to visibly reduce corruption and irregularities. Public hearings have legal basis. Public hearings are conducted on the basis of Article 20(2),21(2) of our Constitution and Anti Corruption Act 2004, Right to Information Act 2009, Government approved National Integrity Strategy, 2012.

Each public hearing is open to all, including local dignitaries, government service citizens, government officials, media and civil society representatives, lawyers, NGO representatives and other interested parties. In addition, all the relevant public representatives including the local Honorable Member of Parliament, Mayor, Upazila Chairman and Municipal Commissioner are invited to the public hearing. Public hearings bridge the gap between the local administration and the people. Apart from this, it is possible to make people aware about government services and rules, develop service delivery methods, make officials aware of their responsibilities and duties and build public opinion against corruption. Anti-corruption commission organizes public hearings in all offices taking into account the complaints made by people. All the complaints received through public hearing which cannot be settled immediately, directions are given by the ACC for settlement. Whether these instructions are being implemented is regularly followed up by the ACC.

The government has already made arrangements to deliver many services directly to the consumers through digital channels. Meanwhile, various types of allowances of the government have been directly delivered to the beneficiaries through G2P. This has reduced corruption. Land offices have come under digital services by providing “Vumiseba”. Through this, people’s expectations about land office have been fulfilled for a long time.

The government has set a target to make Bangladesh a developed country by 2041 by reducing corruption in line with the SDG targets through strict anti-corruption stance in government, transparency in government service delivery, ensuring accountability and making people aware and involved. It will be possible to build the golden Bangladesh of the dream of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation, through the efforts of all concerned in the implementation of the goal.

*Writer : NGO Worker*

# Be Aware Of Human Rights

**Professor Moin Uddin**

Human rights are the essential facilities for human life, rights, equality and dignified life. Human rights are the birthright of human beings. Rights can never be taken away from anyone. On December 10, 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted at the United Nations. The basic human rights of people have been identified there. For this, December 10 is celebrated as Human Rights Day. According to the National Human Rights Commission Act, 2009, “Human Rights means the life, rights, equality and dignity of an individual guaranteed by the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh and the human rights declared in various international human rights instruments ratified by the People’s Republic of Bangladesh and enforceable by the customary courts of Bangladesh. The principles of human rights are equality, humanity, dignity, social justice. The principles of human rights accepted internationally have been recognized in the Bangladesh constitution and various provisions have been included in the constitution to protect the human rights of citizens. Article 11 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh states, “The Republic shall be a democracy, where fundamental human rights and freedoms shall be guaranteed, and respect for the dignity and value of human beings shall be guaranteed.” The Constitution includes provisions for the protection of economic and social human rights such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, public health, employment, rest and recreation and social security, and civil, political and cultural rights.

Protection of human rights and its development is the main responsibility of the state. The state works to protect the human rights of the people through its administrative, judicial and legal departments. Different countries of the world establish national human rights institutions to provide the necessary recommendations to the state to improve the human rights situation in their countries. Although formed by the state, national human rights institutions operate independently. They monitor the overall human rights situation in the country and after due review make necessary recommendations to the state in this regard. Through its own observations on various issues, it provides necessary recommendations to the government to improve the human rights situation and advises the government to identify those responsible for human rights violations through investigation and take necessary measures against them. The importance of such institutions is increasing day by day in the country.

At present, more or less 120 countries of the world have National Human Rights Commissions. The National Human Rights Commission in Bangladesh was established in June 2010 by the National Human Rights Commission Act-2009 with a chairman, one full-time member and five unpaid members.

The jurisdiction of the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh is quite wide. This jurisdiction is reserved in the National Human Rights Commission Act and international human rights treaties to which Bangladesh is a party, etc. According to Section-12 of the National Human Rights Commission Act 2009, the functions of the Commission are as follows- To investigate any complaint of violation of human rights with powers similar to that of a civil court under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908. Even if the complaint is not filed with the Commission, the Commission may receive the complaint *suo moto*; Visiting places of detention such as jails, police stations etc. and making recommendations to the government for their development; Inspecting service institutions such as hospitals, educational institutions and providing recommendations to the government to improve their standards; Providing recommendations to the government for its effective implementation by reviewing the recognized measures under the existing laws of the country; researching various international instruments on human rights and making recommendations to the government for their implementation; Taking necessary initiatives to harmonize and harmonize domestic laws with international human rights laws; Conduct research on human rights issues and play a role in their implementation in educational and professional institutions; Creating public awareness on human rights through publicity, publications, seminars, symposiums, workshops and other similar measures; to settle any grievance by mediation and conciliation; Providing training to members of law enforcement agencies and others on human rights protection issues; Providing necessary advice and guidance to aggrieved persons/service seekers in cases of human rights violations; Competing as necessary in any court case or legal proceeding for violation of human rights or providing legal assistance to the victim.

Bangladeshi citizens of any age can complain to the commission regardless of caste, religion, caste. The aggrieved person himself or any other person or institution on his behalf can also file a complaint. Considering the situation, the commission can also accept complaints on its own initiative. Complaints can be made to the National Human Rights Commission if there is a violation or threat of violation of the rights granted to all citizens in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, or if the rights described in recognized international human

rights laws are violated. If someone feels that his right to life, equality and dignity owed to the state as a human being has been violated or threatened to be violated i.e. human rights (life, right , rights to equality and dignity) are violated or incitement to violations or negligence to prevent violations of these rights can be complained to the Human Rights Commission. Complaints can be sent by hand writing or typing on the prescribed form of the Commission or on white paper, appearing at the office of the Commission in person or through a representative or by post, fax or e-mail. There is an opportunity to attach other documents, pictures, audio, video clips etc. with the complaint. There is a facility to file complaints through online complaint management system software. For filing complaints online [www.complaint.nhrc.org.bd](http://www.complaint.nhrc.org.bd); Visit the website and follow the next instructions.

After receiving the complaint the Selection Cell of the Commission will examine the legal aspect of the complaint; If the Selection Cell finds that the application is outside the jurisdiction of the Commission, it will send a written reply to the address of the complainant within the next seven days with advice on what the complainant should do. And if the complaint is within the jurisdiction of the Commission, the Commission will investigate the matter of the complaint, if the investigation reveals the violation of human rights, then the Commission will try to settle the dispute between the complainant and the accused through mediation and conciliation, if the mediation is not successful, a case or any other proceedings will be filed against the person who violated the human rights. The Commission will make recommendations to the appropriate authorities to do so.

No financial transaction/expenditure is required at any stage from filing of complaint to settlement for making complaint or inquiry about complaint, pre-complaint consultation etc. The main objective of the commission is to preserve and develop the overall human rights situation of the country by ensuring that the state institutions do not abuse their powers and violate the rights of citizens to dignity, respect, equality etc. Address of the Commission - National Human Rights Commission (a statutory independent state institution established by the National Human Rights Commission Act, 2009) BTMC Bhawan (9th Floor), 7-9 Kawran Bazar, Dhaka-1215, Helpline: 16108 PABX: 02-55013726-28, E-mail: [info@nhrc.org.bd](mailto:info@nhrc.org.bd).

Everyone should be aware of human rights. By establishing social justice, it will be possible to ensure the dignity, respect and equality of citizens by transforming the country into a welfare state.

**Writer : Educationist**

# **Ignorance Is the Main Cause Of Human Trafficking**

**Shah Jahan Kibria**

Human trafficking is one of the heinous crimes of modern civilization. We often hear about human trafficking, but we need to know about human trafficking. Every year many people are victims of human trafficking. We know through mass media and social media that thousands of people are being trafficked in the name of taking them abroad. The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012 is in force in the country to prevent and suppress human trafficking. According to Section 3 of the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2012, human trafficking means “the purchase, sale, collection or acceptance, deportation or transfer, transportation of any person inside or outside Bangladesh for the purpose of sexual exploitation or oppression or labor exploitation or any other exploitation or oppression. or detaining or harboring, intimidation or coercion of any person, deceiving any person or exploiting socio-economic or environmental or any other disadvantage, any means of obtaining the consent of a person who has control over him by means of money or any other advantage” shall be understood as trafficking in human beings. However, if a child is a victim of trafficking, it shall not be considered whether the means of committing the crime of human trafficking described above have been followed. . Therefore, the transfer of a child with or without the consent of the non-parent for any illegitimate purpose will be considered as human trafficking.

Human trafficking is a means by which people of all genders, ages, races and cultures are bought and sold for free labor and sex. Simply put, it is slavery. Those most at risk are women, children, adolescents, homeless individuals, immigrants, and children in foster care. Many times people do not realize that they are victims of human trafficking. In other cases, victims are unable to seek help or are afraid to seek help. On December 18, 2013, through a resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, it was decided to observe July 30 every year as the World Anti- Human Trafficking Day around the world. The day aims to promote and protect the rights of victims of trafficking. Still, the rate of human trafficking is not decreasing every year.

This heinous crime cannot be committed by a single person alone. There is a big group behind this crime. There are links between brokers in countries where human trafficking takes place. This crime is

committed through group planning. Human trafficking in our country is done by season. Smugglers consider winter as the most suitable time for trafficking because the sea is calmer during this time, so they use small boats to smuggle people to different countries including Thailand, Malaysia. Bangladesh tops the list of international organizations in terms of human trafficking. And the main reason is unemployment. A large number of unemployed and poor people of the country think that if they go abroad, their fortunes will turn. With the belief that family prosperity will come, they risk their lives in illegal ways and migrate abroad. Traffickers capitalize on this belief and gain their interests. Similarly for women traffickers target divorcees, young widows, jobseekers from different areas. Many times the smugglers kidnap or trap love and smuggle them to the country and abroad. These people are victims of other crimes besides trafficking. Such as - fraud, forced physical and mental torture, forced sex, forced labour, ransom, drug trafficking, etc. Many crimes are organized together through human trafficking.

Our daily lives are now transformed into digital platforms. The crime of human trafficking has conquered cyberspace. The Internet and digital platforms provide numerous tools for traffickers to recruit, exploit, and control trafficked persons; arranges their transportation and accommodation; Advertise trafficked persons and reach out to potential clients; Deeply secure communication between criminals and hiding criminal proceeds is helping them to do so quickly, cheaply and anonymously. Technology often helps human trafficking criminals operate internationally and avoid detection. Traffickers use social media to identify male and female victims, including children, to recruit their agents. E-mail and messaging and online platforms facilitate the luring of trafficked persons and advertising to potential agents to know about trafficked persons. In contrast, the government's A2I provides digital support against human trafficking.

The use of technology to prevent human trafficking is also increasing day by day. Future success in eradicating human trafficking depends on how law enforcement agencies, the criminal justice system, and others use technology in their operations. Law enforcement agencies in the country and A2I work closely with the administration to identify victims through the hotline 999 used to combat human traffickers. Monitoring the movement of traffickers through advanced technology, monitoring the methods of trafficker networks, taking technological assistance in the investigation of trafficking cases; Government concerned authorities aim to enhance justice process through digital evidence to assist victims in criminal cases and provide support services to rescued survivors of trafficking.

Another reason for human trafficking is ignorance. Human trafficking must be stopped for the safety of women, men and children and for this the conscious sections of the society must build a strong social movement. Nationwide public awareness activities and social movements are very important to prevent trafficking. Meetings, gatherings, seminars, discussions and exchanges should be organized at the national and village levels to prevent human trafficking. Active participation of local government representatives, local leaders, teachers and religious leaders should be ensured. So that they can play an active role in creating awareness among the people in their respective areas. Awareness can be created by bringing the plight of returning trafficking victims to the grassroots in remote areas. Campaigning should be continued to create awareness by identifying the areas from which human trafficking is taking place. To reduce unemployment, youth and women should increase technical education and provide employment in their own country. Enhancing relations with developed countries by taking government diplomatic steps to export manpower. Besides, efforts to prevent human trafficking should be continued by increasing the number of coast guards and border guards in coastal and border areas. They have to provide necessary weapons and modern equipment. Sea border protection by adopting modern methods is the need of the hour. Round-the-clock movement of people can be monitored by watch-towers in border areas including Teknaf. Besides, surveillance should be increased by water, land and air routes.

Media can play an important role in creating public awareness to prevent human trafficking. Mass media can conduct regular public awareness programs and warning activities. For several years, the media has been promoting various programs on this issue. Films and dramas can play an active role in creating public awareness against human trafficking. Human trafficking is a most heinous business. By eradicating it, we can get rid of modern slavery.

***Writer : Human Rights Activities***







Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurates Dhaka Elevated Expressway



The Motorcade of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Crosses Dhaka Elevated Expressway after inauguration



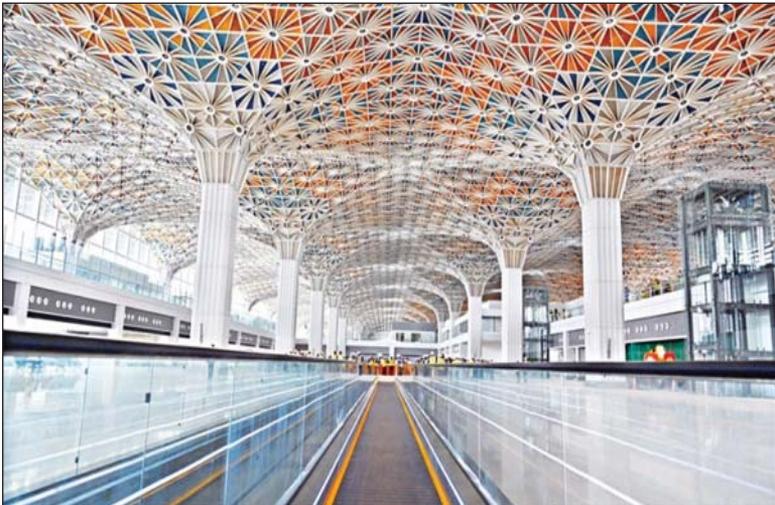
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurates the Padma Bridge Rail Link



After inauguration Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina crosses Padma river by train.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurates the Third Terminal of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport



Third Terminal of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport



Gerakhola Bridge at Muksudpur in Gopalganj, a step towards 'Smart Bangladesh'



The renowned Selfie Road at Fatikchari in Chattogram



The Central Mosque at Sajek Valley, Rangamati



The longest railway bridge of the country over Rupsha river at Khulna



Newly constructed Banglabandha Land Part at Tetulia in Panchagarh



Eyecatching Road of Rajshahi Metropolitan City



Under Construction rail bridge over the Jamuna river



Purbachal Expressway in Dhaka, step towards 'Smart Bangladesh'



The 'Stair's to heaven', a new horizon of Smart Tourism in Khagrachari



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Tunnel in Chattogram



Newly Constructed Dhaka-Tangail Highway



Metrorail



Newly Constructed Cox's Bazar Iconic Railway Station



Newly Constructed Matarbari deep sea port



Replica of Bangabandhu Tri-Tower, a ongoing Project of Smart Bangladesh



Under construction replica of bridge over Mayur river Gallamari in Khulna

