

# Bangladesh in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Harvard Conference Recommendations

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## Preamble

On June 13-14, 2008, an international conference was organized by Bangladesh Development Initiative, Democracy and Development in Bangladesh Forum, and the Ash Institute of Democratic Governance at Harvard University's Center for Government and International Studies (CGIS) to address the theme: *Bangladesh in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The purpose of the conference was to bring together scholars, practitioners, students, and well-wishers as a community to contemplate the opportunities and challenges facing Bangladesh. The response was overwhelming. About ninety papers were submitted from four continents covering topics as diverse as foreign policy and infrastructure to health care, education, politics, and even shrimp culture. From the submitted papers, about sixty were ultimately chosen for presentation. In addition there were two panel discussions on foreign policy and the accomplishments of "BRAC at 35." The conference sessions were embellished by luncheon and dinner speakers who, in their own rights, added further dimension and richness to the already star-studded list of participants. A cultural program was also organized by the Boston community that struck a deep chord with the theme of the conference. Highlights of the conference and key recommendations are summarized here for various stakeholders: the political leadership and its administrative wing to contemplate, adapt and adopt; for researchers and scholars to embellish and build upon; and the general reader to be informed of the policy options.

### Introduction

Bangladesh has made remarkable progress with economic growth reaching almost 7% in FY 2006-2007. This has been termed as the Bangladesh Paradox in spite of the country's unstable political environment and widespread poverty. Bangladesh has also been grouped in the Next-11 by Goldman Sachs, while global banks and multilateral institutions such Citibank, JPMorgan and others see Bangladesh as a key investment opportunity. This opportunity stems from its large base of low-cost labor pool, a domestic market of 150 million consumers, and being a potential gateway to another 3 billion people in the Asian region. Other contributors to the growing potential of Bangladesh include the globalizing environment, proliferation of information technology and connectivity, the advancement of democracy—albeit in fits and starts—and a growing resilience among the population born of battling prolonged adversity. The recent advancements and accomplishments in Bangladesh that were particularly noted include a tripling of food production, doubling of per capita income, population control, steady manpower exports, growing shipbuilding and pharmaceutical industries, global peace-keeping operations, contributions of the NGOs, and educational opportunities -- especially for women.

However, Bangladesh has also had to weather many a storm: civil unrest, assassinations, culture of corruption, incompetence, strong egos, an identity

crisis, external pressures, economic downturns, debilitated institutions, weak infrastructure, widespread poverty and related challenges since its cataclysmic birth. For challenges of such mammoth proportions the solutions are neither easy nor immediate; yet there was a positive ethos at the conference that hope is alive, progress is possible, and there is a dogged determination among the people to succeed by reinventing their image and identity as a modern and progressive state, despite the state of misrule in the country for several decades.

What also emerged from the conference was a critical need to reform the political and administrative structures, policies and processes that have hindered the nation's physical advancement; rethink the nation's foreign policy prerogatives and options; build the nation's infrastructure to serve as a platform for accelerated growth; initiate economic policies that address the needs of both rural and urban economic groups by empowering them to pursue entrepreneurial ventures that span SMEs to large industrial ventures to support value-added production; recast the education system by envisioning an unified (not uniform) system from bottom-up by aligning each stage of education with the next higher stage within a global vision and by allowing flexibility of movement from one stream to another to enable the citizenry to build upon their strengths; and address population, health and NGO activities that drive productivity and individual growth.

To attain the above, the need for visionary and enlightened leadership was highlighted to lift the nation's spirit, pride, and sense of purpose and to address both individual and community needs. At the conference, a confluence of many hearts and minds interested in the future of Bangladesh, there was also a felt need to kindle the desire in those who are able and willing, including the Bangladesh Diaspora, to help steer the nation to more vibrant shores through collective efforts and contributions in a spirit of partnership.

What follows is a series of substantive recommendations that were proposed by six breakout groups that were assembled on the final day of the conference. Participants were urged to make serious recommendations designed to establish priorities, to initiate further discussions and dialogue, to motivate researchers and thinkers to embellish on the ideas, and to urge practitioners to adopt and adapt any or all of the recommendations to forge the path forward. As a record and for posterity, the recommendations summarized by experienced team leaders, are offered next in six segments.

### **Recommendations of the group charged with: Democracy, Nation-building and Governance**

#### ***Justice, Due Process of Law and Human Rights***

Being the seventh largest and the most densely populated nation in the world, leaders of Bangladesh are faced with a myriad of human rights challenges, which are more likely to be met in a democracy. Finding the appropriate strategy to effectively utilize the nation's vast human resources in a climate of "freedom from hunger" could be the greatest challenge facing its leadership. Only during the liberation war were those human resources utilized to the extent that the Bengali struggle for freedom and justice approximated a People's War. And as a result Bangladesh emerged as the only Muslim majority country whose successful struggle for independence became rooted to democracy and justice. The new nation ensured its newly won sovereignty when Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman persuaded Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to withdraw Indian troops from Bangladesh within three months of the surrender of Pakistan army before the joint command of Indian Army and Bangladesh Liberation Force. The peaceful withdrawal of Indian troops in a record time would have been much more difficult without effective diplomacy, which is more likely to happen in a democratic environment tempered by justice. Justice, defined as fairness in multidimensional interactions involving humans and

their institutions, balances democracy with the striving for security.<sup>1</sup> Thus the fairness principle contributes to societal stability and helps to create a common ground on which political communities with the nation states being their highest expression can build an ideology of understanding and cooperation. Bangladesh's success in charting out a close strategic relation with India and Pakistan's failure to accommodate legitimate demands of the Bengalis could be premised on this principle of fairness. In this context freedom and political autonomy become integral parts of justice that "specify the fair terms of cooperation they [citizens] give themselves when fairly represented as free and equal persons."<sup>2</sup> The emergence of Bangladesh epitomized the dismal failure of Pakistan's leadership to understand and act on this fundamental human value of justice. It would be equally applicable to relations between and within nations, which captures the spirit of SAARC.

Issue Elaboration: Justice has been the driving moral force that led to a "people's war," creating a sovereign democratic Bangladesh with immense possibilities. But without a deep commitment of the leadership to justice as the basic principle of fairness in both policymaking and policy implementing, i.e., governance, most potential for advancement would remain static. Ensuring human rights and the due process of law—two most important dimensions of justice—could transform the static into a dynamic state of just policies and good governance. In that context the legal system, which still carries the baggage of colonialism, must be reformed. Repealing the Special Powers Act, which blatantly violates the due process of law, could be the top priority of reformers. Justice also demands giving everyone his due; and, therefore, reparations are due to those who bore the brunt of the liberation war and subsequent human rights violations. By the same token, punishment must be meted out to those found guilty of committing "selective genocide"<sup>3</sup> in open court trials. Those found guilty as abettors but repentant and seeking forgiveness could be considered for mercy. Upon the recommendation of a "Repentance and Mercy Commission"—call it by any other name—the president could exercise his/her constitutional authority to grant pardon.

#### ***The Right of Dissent***

The right of dissent captures the basic freedoms, providing the essence of democracy, without which a democratic state cannot properly function. This core human value has different dimensions encompassing freedom of speech to press to assembly to religion enshrined in most of today's constitutions, including

Bangladesh's. But in the name of security most states have infringed this basic democratic right and Bangladesh is no exception. In November-December 2002, 44 arrested individuals died in custody during the government's Clean Heart Operation. The same year unsubstantiated sedition charges were leveled against a leading intellectual and two journalists. In December-January 03, Professor Muntasir Mamun and journalist Shahriar Kabir, Reuter's Bangladesh representative, were arrested and re-arrested. Both have sued the government for damages for their illegal imprisonment and torture. On December 27, 2003, Secretary General of Amnesty International (AI) formally charged the government for denying custodial deaths. AI Secretary General alleged that some of the arrests were politically motivated. AI chief also regretted that the government did not respond to her urgings to repeal the "repressive laws", including the Special Powers Act enacted in 1974 to ratify the Convention against Torture and to investigate and take action against all incidents of torture.<sup>4</sup> Bangladesh born AI chief, Irene Khan, alleged that police and prison authorities had ignored court orders for bail, undermining the judicial system because those who had been released on bail or by court order declaring the detention illegal "are still being harassed or re-arrested on similar charges."<sup>5</sup> A recent case involved an investigative journalist working for the English language newspaper The Daily Star. According to a Human Rights Watch report, he was picked up from home in the dead of night on May 11, 2007 and tortured by a security agency for his dissenting blog and press coverage of serious human rights violations. He was released after recanting his reports. But he became so afraid for his personal safety that he sought and received asylum from Sweden.<sup>6</sup>

Issue Elaboration: Indeed the right of dissent is the heart of democracy. Without it meaningful dialogues and negotiations between individuals and groups to resolve conflicts could not occur, which would lead to intimidation and suppression of those holding different views on policy matters and governance. Here the underlying principle of justice as fairness could bridge the gap between national security and individual freedom. The recent verdicts of the US Supreme Court on five cases, including the right of Habeas Corpus of alleged terrorists being held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, have reinforced this right for a working democratic country despite its many shortcomings<sup>7</sup>. In order to ensure the right of dissent a fledgling democracy like Bangladesh might seriously consider establishing a high powered Human Rights Commission with direct links to the President or Prime Minister depending on who holds

the portfolio of defense at a given time. Also, implementing the constitutional provision of Ombudsman could significantly mitigate the alleged inhuman treatment some citizens have reportedly received while in custody of civilian law enforcement and military intelligence agencies. Both the current caretaker and future elected governments must consider whether or not these Commissions will be authorized to hold hearings on grievances from aggrieved citizenry. The fact is without having subpoena and contempt powers, and most importantly without full support of the government, these Commissions would be toothless.

### ***Right of the Opposition Parties in a Functional Democracy***

Anchored to the basic democratic value of the right of dissent, opposition parties serve an important function in a functional democratic government by providing a different perspective to problems being addressed and solutions considered. Without it, majority rule turns into a tyranny of the majority.

Issue Elaboration: In order to make a democracy more functional, serious efforts must be undertaken by elected leaders to build stakes for opposition parties to meaningfully participate in parliament. It could involve, for example, apportioning time to opposition parties in parliamentary deliberations and committee assignments in proportion to their representation, i.e., seats in parliamentary. Also for a balanced approach to assuring the main opposition party a meaningful role in parliamentary deliberations, an important institutional change could be considered whereby the Deputy Speaker of Parliament as well as Associate Chairs of Parliamentary Committees would be selected by the opposition. This strategy might prevent future deadlocks caused by intransigence of the ruling party to give the opposition enough time to actively participate in parliamentary deliberations. More often than not this has resulted in boycott of parliamentary deliberations by the opposition followed by street agitations and general strikes that have had adverse effects on the national economy and political stability.

### ***Devolution of Power to the Rice-roots***

The decentralization of administrative power to the local level of government can have a positive impact on motivation to develop from bottom up. Home rule empowers local government to create/modify their charters and run their affairs without approval of central legislature or bureaucracy, subject to the

constitution of the state. For example, the movement for devolution of power to local government, culminating in the “Home Rule Act,” following the American Civil War, changed the destiny of the United States of America for the better. It gave more power to local governments, e.g., village, city and county councils, school boards, municipalities and corporation, in choosing their form of governance relating to education, law enforcement, taxation, and other substantive matters, which created a powerful force for self help and development.<sup>8</sup>

Issue Elaboration: Empowering local self government—politically and fiscally—through free and fair elections would reduce dependence on the bureaucracy, thereby helping the people at the rice-roots level to take initiative in defining and solving a myriad for local problems. The self-help and creativity thus engendered could become a major force of nation building. It could also lead to greater economic development in rural areas, setting perhaps a new trend of reverse migration from urban to rural areas, significantly narrowing the urban-rural divide and the resulting socio-economic-political problems facing many of today’s developing countries, including Bangladesh.

### ***Peaceful, Free and Fair Elections***

To select legislators and governors, the highest policymakers of a nation, through open, free and fair elections provides the hallmark of a democratic state. The legitimacy of a democratic government is assured by free, fair and accessible elections. An unquestioned, above-board election gives elected leaders the legitimacy to mobilize public support, even among supporters of opposition parties, for a myriad of important policies which can make a difference in the quality of life of the citizenry.

Issue Elaboration: A firm institutional framework of the electoral process needs to be created to prevent electoral fraud and violence, which routinely claims lives in elections in most developing countries. It could include stringent guidelines for fiscal accountability of candidates, impartial monitoring of polling stations, heavy fines and imprisonment for fraudulent voting. A non-partisan Election Commission with Subpoena and Contempt authority, headed by a strong willed, politically neutral Chief Election Commissioner would have the constitutional authority to cancel elections of constituencies for gross violations of electoral rules and/or electoral violence. Such a framework could significantly strengthen the “Justice as Fairness Principle” of the electoral institution.

### ***Reducing Dependency on the Bureaucracy***

Bureaucracies in ex-colonial developing countries like Bangladesh still carry the vestiges of a colonial mindset. They tend to hold on to the values underlying colonial rule. With increasing effectiveness they became strong buffers between the rulers and the ruled. As a result, the bureaucracies became highly developed to the detriment of indigenous representative institutions during the colonial era, and the colonial glitter continued unabated following independence, undermining natural growth of electoral processes and institutions. An equitable sharing of power with elected representatives at different governmental levels could bridge the gap between colonial exclusiveness of merit-cum-social status based power—meritocracy—and participative inclusiveness and accountability in a post-colonial democratic country.

Issue Elaboration: Values connected to bureaucratic power and electoral legitimate authority need to be reassessed and reprioritized. Here the civil society must play a crucial role. Different segments of that society must develop their own expectations and the ways they can be met to help the society as a whole become more humane, responsive to needs and accountable for its decisions and actions. These values must be reflected in the recruiting, selecting and promoting guidelines of the Public Service Commission and departmental committees dealing with career evaluation and advancement. To this end interactive, inter-sectoral decision making and implementing institutions could be formed for different purposes. For example, the charge of one such institution could be to publicize dangerously counterproductive delays of policy implementation in specific cases and the degree of duplication, inefficiency and corruption, if any, involved. Such mobilization of support from the civil society could help increase responsiveness, cut red tape and remove unexplainable bureaucratic barriers against policy implementation for good governance. In this context the constitutional provision of “Ombudsman” could be implemented, at least on an experimental basis.

### ***Renewing the Spirit of Social Contract***

Social contract theories espoused by political philosophers such as John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean Jacques Rousseau, among others, make consent of the governed as the basis of a legitimate government.

Issue Elaboration: Such a renewal would contribute to a vital socio-economic-political balance by mixing human rights with accountability at every societal level. It would call upon institutional reformers to become transforming change agents, striving to be leaders and teachers at the same time, raising the consciousness of their followers to a higher level at which spontaneous mobilization of human and material resources could happen. The value of the great leap “from status to contract” must be inculcated through a reformed, progressive education system and a deep political commitment to change of the mindset of leaders at every level in every field from the self-centered transactional relationships to public interest based transforming ones between themselves and their constituents. In this regard fundamental reforms of religious institutions, particularly Quami Madrassas mostly funded by Wahhabi charities of Saudi Arabia, are in order for reviving the spirit of Islam about an open quest for knowledge and peace. Buttressed by returning Bangladeshi Jihadists from Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, the radicalized Mullahs and their pupils continue unabated to distort Islam in these private Madrassas to justify violence against secular minded Muslims, disadvantaged women and religious minorities in Bangladesh. It is important for justice and security to bring the private (Quami or Nationalist) Madrassas under the purview of existing directorate of primary education, the same way the Directorate of Public Instruction brought dysfunctional private primary schools under its jurisdiction in 1973. Through such public incorporation and curricular reforms Madrassas could achieve a balance between religious education and liberal arts education. This would help Madrassa students to broaden their horizons and appreciate democratic values of mutual tolerance of opposing ideas, accommodation and compromises in search of common grounds for problem solving and conflict resolution, inclusive-participatory decision making and implementing processes. This would also make them more competitive in the job market. It could also make them less hostile towards Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) committed to empowering the disadvantaged women through an increasing number of novel community development systems, such as BRAC’s Non-Formal Education, GRAMEEN’s Micro-Lending banking and GONO SHASTYA’s healthcare. These three largest Bangladeshi NGOs and other smaller ones such as NIJERA KORI have raised a new set of aspirations among millions of poor Bangladeshis. As an important part of general education reform political leaders regardless of their party affiliations must consider de-linking organized labor and student

groups from partisan politics and allocate significantly more resources to human resource development, particularly for R&D initiatives at different universities and institutes of science and technology. The de-linking will contain militia politics, which causes socio-political unrest not only in Bangladesh but most other developing countries as well.

### ***Ensure the Right of Information***

Free flow of information is vital to any functional democracy, helping to create an open society in which transparency and accountability of policy making and implementing processes become a part of the political culture. Research shows that free flow of information and open communication provide the foundation of not only good policy making process but also effective governance.

Issue Elaboration: This important value of democracy must be institutionalized through an enforceable Freedom of Information Act. Unless the government can demonstrate that any piece of information being sought by a citizen is likely to compromise national security, it must be accessible to the concerned citizens. Institutionally a non-partisan Information Commission with Subpoena and Contempt powers could be put in place to enforce the guidelines of the Information Act and hold hearings, if and when needed. Free flow of information engenders transparency and accountability in decision making and implementing processes in public and private sectors. Future elected representatives might seriously consider utilizing strategies to ensure accountability of policy makers by utilizing strategies of “Recall” whereby corrupt elected officials could be voted out of office in special elections. By the same token citizens could be empowered to propose and ratify important public policies through respectively “Initiative” and “Referendum” in special and/or general elections.

### ***Reiterate and Reinforce the Spirit of Panch Sheel***

In a regional power struggle Beijing reasserted its historical claim over Tibet by forcibly incorporating it in China as a “national autonomous region” in 1951, nominally under the traditional authority of the Dalai Lama. Although lodging a formal protest against China’s “aggression,” Nehru realized that India could do little to overturn Chinese control of Tibet. With a strategic shift from adversarial to cooperative mode, both Nehru and Chou En Lai engaged one another in a peace offensive, culminating in Sino-Indian Treaty in 1954. The

preamble of the treaty contained five principles or PANCH SHEEL: respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. It became the template for peaceful cooperation celebrated at the 1955 Bandung Conference, which led to the Non Aligned Movement (NAM). The spirit of PANCH SHEEL once helped provide a middle ground in the bi-polar struggle in a "Cold War" environment having a stabilizing effect. Despite periodic lapses in 1959, 1962, 1998, the spirit of PANCH SHEEL has survived. Particularly for the emerging ex-colonial nations in a tense international environment it seemed to start a positive trend of mutual cooperation and respect—a reinforcement of the ideology of regional cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

Issue Elaboration: To what purpose and extent does the spirit of PANCH SHEEL apply to the environment of a fledgling Democracy like Bangladesh? Applied to domestic power relations PANCH SHEEL could have a stabilizing effect by creating a middle ground on which rational cooperation and compromises could replace traditional all or nothing approach to politics. This could be achieved through a series of cooperative endeavors involving representatives from the government, professional-occupational groups, minorities, women's associations and the civil society at large. Hopefully within a new institutional framework any interested segment of any cooperatives could lawfully participate in a policymaking and/or policy implementing process in domestic and foreign affairs as non-voting members with the power of persuasion. This would prevent the screening of negative feedback from those adversely affected by a given policy and/or the way it is being implemented, reasserting autonomy of individuals and groups—an important dimension of Justice as the principle of fairness.

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### **Recommendations of the group charged with: Bangladesh Foreign Policy**

In the years to come, Bangladesh's major priorities in building and maintaining its foreign relations should focus on improving the image of Bangladesh in the international community by promoting

multilateralism in South Asia and harmonious bilateral relations with India, focusing on economic diplomacy, improving the diplomatic service, monitoring the ministry of foreign affairs and missions abroad, promoting remittance and bridging the diasporas, encouraging national consensus based policy formulation and addressing issues of global climate change.

### ***Improving the Image of Bangladesh in the International Community***

The primary task of Bangladesh foreign policy should be to establish a positive image of the country. Bangladesh's reform and opening up, the growth of the media and cable television, the rapid expansion of the cellular phone network (the subscriber base should cross 50 million by the end of the year), and technological improvements and reforms in the communications and the ICT sectors constitute significant positive developments, as do developments in the ship building, pharmaceutical, textile and RMG sectors that need to be projected. It is also important to transmit messages to the appropriate groups regarding the on-going initiatives to combat corruption, regulatory reforms and improvement in the business climate in the country.

### ***Sustainable Improvement in Bangladesh-India Bilateral Relations***

Bangladesh occupies an important geo-strategic location in South Asia; therefore it must strive to maintain a strong relationship with the other countries in the region. India occupies an important portion in the formulation of the foreign policy of Bangladesh. There are still many unresolved issues in the Bangladesh-India bilateral relations. The proper way to mitigate these problems is to pursue an effective and consistent foreign policy. Apart from the regular diplomatic initiatives such as arranging regular summit level meetings, public diplomacy can also play an important role to solve many of these problems. The government of Bangladesh should try to promote public diplomacy; that is, to promote interaction among the people of both the countries. This can solve a number of broader problems existing between these two countries. However, problems between these countries cannot be solved overnight; it must be resolved on the basis of mutual trust and respect.

### ***Strengthening Regional Cooperation in South Asia***

Among the most noteworthy achievements of Bangladeshi diplomacy has been the creation of

SAARC. As such, our diplomacy should continue focusing on strengthening SAARC as a platform for peace and prosperity in the region. A major diplomatic initiative needs to be undertaken to improve cooperation between SAARC, ASEAN, and China. Apart from SAARC, energy cooperation in the region and realizing the aims of the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) require strong, sustained support from institutional and financial sources. Regional cooperation in the energy sector has become vital for maintaining security and development in the region. A comprehensive and integrated trade facilitation framework needs to be adopted in our foreign policy by promoting integrated transport infrastructure including transit and transshipment of goods; facilitating development and modernization of Chittagong and Chalna sea ports as regional hubs; pursuing economic diplomacy to remove non-tariff barriers in trade between Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka; promoting regional customs cooperation; and promoting regional energy cooperation.

### ***Economic Diplomacy***

The importance of economic diplomacy has become a vital issue to pursue effective diplomatic objectives in the post-Cold War era. As a developing country, Bangladesh should pursue this trend of diplomacy by which it can gain the most out of the international economic flow, thus ensuring the overall development of the country. Bangladesh should seek out market access in different parts of the world. Through economic diplomacy, Bangladesh should use its geopolitical influence and relationships to attain effective results in the areas of maintaining a balanced relationship with the regional countries and member states of SAARC and BIMSTEC; developing and maintaining close linkages with the OIC, ASEAN, EU, and the Commonwealth; strengthening relations with the global powers - USA, Japan, Britain, Russia, and China; and actively espousing non-proliferation and disarmament. Besides, an effective structure of economic diplomacy should address securing unimpeded entry of its products into foreign markets through WTO mechanisms; attracting FDI; promoting international and intra-regional trade; expanding and improving the functioning of markets; developing regional telecommunications, energy and transport networks; and consolidating the right political climate to facilitate these objectives.

### ***Improving the Diplomatic Service***

Due to absence of a coherent foreign policy,

Bangladesh has not traditionally held periodic reviews of the operation and effectiveness of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and diplomatic services. The whole of the Foreign Service should be doubled in size with a cadre of at least 600 professional diplomats. Each diplomat should be fluent in at least one foreign language other than English. Area specialists will be the norm along with a pool of multilateral specialists, including a pool of experts in the field of trade negotiations and the WTO. Foreign postings/ assignments should be made on the basis of their demonstrated skills, knowledge and expertise. Diplomats should be properly trained in the fields of language, culture and related areas. The need for international subject expertise within the MoFA is compelling. Extensive and periodic training on subjects such as international negotiations, trade, security, and economic regions should become a standard and integral part of the Foreign Service.

### ***Monitoring the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Missions Abroad***

There is a need to establish a functional and separate parliamentary committee to monitor and evaluate the performance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic missions abroad. It should be neutral to evaluate the performance of the aforementioned ones. This evaluation and monitoring should be done on a regular basis so that there should remain a balance in the policies pursued abroad by different diplomatic missions. The Committee should review strategies to achieve effective policy objectives and their performance costs, and also to provide a strategic perspective on the functions of the ministry. The Committee should also take initiatives to improve linkages between the MoFA, various trade bodies and the private sector in order to expand export promotion.

### ***Remittances and the Diaspora***

Remittances from economic migrants play a critical role in the Bangladeshi economy. MoFA should be instrumental in facilitating contributions and also attracting investments from the Bangladesh Diaspora. There is a dire need to focus on boosting foreign remittances and attracting tangible and intangible investment from the non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs). It is, therefore, important to include measures to build a bridge with the Non-Resident Bangladeshi (NRB) population. NRBs can contribute most significantly to the national economy of Bangladesh, especially in terms of investment. The foreign policy of Bangladesh should promote the

investment facilities of the NRBs. These types of investments can result in the increase of the foreign reserves of the country, as well as promote its gross productivity. It is highly likely that if the policies are convenient to the NRBs, they will be more keen to invest in Bangladesh. Moreover, the Diaspora population could potentially allow access to the global economic and financial chain, as they may have linkages with foreign trade channels. These further opportunities should also be exploited to further the development of the country. These efforts should be well-coordinated and implemented as a top priority.

### ***National Consensus on Foreign Policy***

In most cases, foreign policies are formulated arbitrarily, without political consensus. As a result, policies may seem fragmented and inconsistent. In the formulation of Bangladesh's foreign policy, it is important to uphold national interests above any other consideration. The policies should be directed to achieve national goals rather than regime interest. A well-coordinated and consistent foreign policy is important to promote the national image of Bangladesh to the international community.

### ***Global Climate Change***

The rapid change of the environment has now become the focal point of many countries, mainly the coastal ones. The impact of global climatic changes are already having major effects on the economic performance of Bangladesh and on the lives and livelihoods of poor people, acting as severe economic shocks. Climate change is clearly not just an environmental issue but one with severe socioeconomic repercussions. Bangladesh's diplomacy should focus on creating an enabling regional and international environment that mitigates the risks and aftermaths of environmental challenges. One such initiative was undertaken in the recent Bali Conference where a specific set of proposals aligned to the position of the G-77 and the Least Developed Countries was presented by the Bangladeshi representatives.

### ***Migration and Refugee Policy***

Bangladesh lacks an effective and up-to-date migration and refugee policy. Bangladesh should ensure effective measures to uphold the rights of Bangladeshis working abroad and improve the remittance facilities for them. Bangladesh is burdened with the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar for decades. Though international bodies are

providing some support to deal with the issue that does not seem to be enough to solve the problem. It is evident that due to the lack of proper migration policies, many of the people who wish to migrate are unable to go abroad. At the same time, the refugee problem is hampering the national economy of Bangladesh to a great extent. This problem is to be settled with due importance. The foreign policy should be effective enough to project these problems to the international community.

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### **Recommendations of the group charged with: Economic Issues**

The themes on the economy that were discussed may be categorized as follows:

- developing rural economies and related sectors
- capital flows
- domestic financial development (FDI, aid, and remittances) as well as domestic saving mobilization through more efficient financial intermediation
- growth and employment

During the discussion session on economics, it was recognized that despite the existence of the shorter term problem of inflation management, the longer term objective of growth and employment would be a more appropriate focus for this conference.

It is true that currently inflation is an acute problem, causing hardship for many because of escalating food prices and transportation costs. However, supply side inflation is a problem that causes a dilemma for policymakers and simply becomes a matter of deciding which must be sacrificed – growth or price stability. The distributional aspects of these policy choices were not discussed at the session.

### ***The Rural Economy***

The role of NGOs in poverty alleviation and employment generation suggested that:

- The current emphasis on micro-credit does not reflect earlier trends that helped instil democratic institutions which would encourage foreign investment.
- NGOs do not provide adequate funding for smooth consumption in disaster prone areas in an effective manner because there is an overemphasis on making such provisions for their own client base.
- NGOs fail to extend entitlements, capacity building, health, education and skill development training, which aim at inducing long lasting benefits. Instead the focus is simply on how many loans are made and what the repayments happen to be. NGOs should function as more than banks.

Most of Bangladesh is rural and employment provision as well as sustainable growth can come from farm and non-farm activities in the rural areas. The prospects of increased migration are not very sustainable for the economy given the excessive and concentrated urbanization that has occurred in Dhaka and Chittagong and the inability of the existing infrastructure to handle such urban growth. Power and water shortages are only two aspects of the pressure on resources while such migration continues.

The creation of non-farm employment opportunities represents the possibility of a more sustainable option that can absorb labor locally without the need for outmigration into urban areas.

Very little emphasis has been placed on developing non-farm enterprises (NFEs) in rural areas. More credit, infrastructure, and support services need to be provided. Women need to be encouraged to start NFEs.

It is seen that better educated households live in safer areas and rely more on NFEs, while relying solely on farming leads to vulnerability in both income and housing. Provisions to allow safe-distance farming so that people can reside in safe areas while they farm on chars could be done without large scale interventions.

### ***Capital Flows***

Bangladesh's share of aid from development finance institutions is expected to fall because of the excessive emphasis of Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) on Heavily Indebted Poor

Countries (HIPC) Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is currently higher than aid, and it is remittances that are the largest source of finances. FDI within EPZs are increasing at a very rapid pace showing that the right conditions allow Bangladesh to be a recipient of such investment when wages and other costs have risen to comparatively high levels in East Asia.

The remittances inflow worldwide is estimated at US\$ 318 billion in 2007 of which developing countries would receive US\$ 240 billion (World Bank 2007). Bangladesh is among the top five receivers of worker remittances among developing countries. Over 70% of these remittances come from the Middle East, Saudi Arabia being the largest source. The following suggestions were offered to smooth the flow of remittances into the country:

- Setting up counseling centers at District Manpower and Employment Offices with automated arrangement of data base of potential migrants and complete information on overseas job markets, costs, benefits, tenure and name of recruiting agencies having valid offer of exporting manpower.
- Making arrangement for legal and transparent contracts between recruiting agencies and job seekers in the presence of officials of BMET including a clause of receiving money through a scheduled bank account of recruiting agency and mandatory submission of a copy of deposit slip to the BMET.
- Providing training for skill development and undertaking programs for language learning.
- Making recruitment fee and transfer cost of fund rational.

### ***Domestic Financial Development***

Loans and Deposits/GDP is very low in Bangladesh compared to low-income countries as a whole. The same is true of branch penetration per capita and ATM use per capita.

Financial deepening is low as is the use of formal market finances for investment purposes. The government should move from its role as an operator and arbiter in the financial system to a facilitator role.

The licensing process should be denationalized and depoliticized and banks should not be rescued outright.

Most important, the government should move away from the implicit guarantee for depositors and owners to applying the existing limited explicit deposit insurance for depositors, while simultaneously relying more on market participants to monitor and discipline banks instead of micro-managing financial institutions.

Regarding capital markets, the following recommendations were made:

- The market needs more good scrips. The process would be easier if good issuers could be attracted by improving the market governance system and eliminating scope for manipulation. There are only limited instances, such as commercial banks/leasing companies, where regulators can impose guidelines relating to capital structure. Hence it may be difficult to force a corporate house to list its equity unless it agrees at the time of licensing or registration. Inadequate disclosure requirement and a culture of family-owned conglomerates deter the expansion of corporate governance into the local industry. Regulators need to play an active role in removing the bureaucratic bottlenecks and promote rules that provide incentives to companies to list their stocks.
- To expedite the market development process, it may be a good idea to decide on certain milestones regarding capital market development and link them to the disbursement of Development Credit Support of the World Bank. The government is making good progress in other sectors including monetary management, corporatization of public-sector banks and others through this linkage.
- The missing link among the Securities & Exchange Commission, Bangladesh Bank, Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission and other regulatory bodies is now being established. Individually they were not serving each other's interest, and there was no effective coordination among them, hence the country was deprived of great initiatives. A dedicated financial market cell at the Ministry of Finance could be formed to coordinate with these regulators as well as other ministries.
- In terms of creating market depth, more profitable state-owned-enterprises (SOEs) should be listed on the stock exchanges. The supply of securities can be increased if the SOEs are

allowed to operate through stock exchanges. Floation of SOE scrips is expected to expand the market. Corporatization of SOEs will bring in transparency as well as confidence on the government financial system.

- Incentive for private sector entrepreneurs to access the capital market should be more noticeable. The tax gap between listed and non-listed companies could be increased. Infrastructure projects should access capital markets to raise finances through bonds and corporations should raise short-term finance through commercial papers. Securitizations should be encouraged and initiatives taken to promote new products in the market.
- In a more developed market, institutional investors such as merchant banks, commercial banks, insurance companies, are major traders of securities. Enforceable and effective laws and rules would attract foreign institutional investors.
- Equity research is not very popular yet in Bangladesh. The quality of brokerages houses should be assessed by the quality of research produced by their independent research departments. The SEC is expected to play an educational role in the process by bringing in international resources and creating investors' awareness through television and other media. Local TV channels should focus on business but more on financial education for the young generation (for example, college and university students) irrespective of their discipline. Young people have every right to learn the mechanisms of saving, investing and the importance of personal financial management.
- Quality analysis needs to address valuation issues in a more pro-active manner. The independent analysts should raise red flags when a scrip is overvalued or undervalued, and the intrinsic value of a traded security should be covered in the research paper. Investors are perhaps depending much on speculative analysis resulting in volatility in the market as opposed to fundamental analysis, which could attract more stable long-term investors who are sure about their investment tenure and expectations. It is observed that whenever there is a downturn in the market, individual investors go on a rampage; these investors should understand that downturns, bearish trends and market corrections are an integral part of stock markets.

## ***Growth and Employment***

Regarding the RMG sector, it was suggested that the export base be diversified, with more items rather than the current focus on knitwear. Locating more factories in different regions of the country would allow better access for workers and multiplier effects to be spread out nationally. Better work conditions, day care, health and education would allow the economic benefits to be better distributed. Also, better labor conditions are needed for improving the national brand image. Control of industrial effluents in the dyeing sector is necessary for safeguarding the environment and the addition of water treatment plants is desirable for new factories.

It was also recognized that several potential areas such as shipbuilding, port development, food processing, and tourism were potential growth sectors and foreign exchange earners. The development of a hub in Dhaka that could be led by Bangladesh Biman so that it would attract foreign investors was also suggested. There was also mention of building up seaports for similar traffic that would generate further investment and revenues. Being located in the crossroads between China and India, Bangladesh has an advantage in potentially serving as a transshipment site.

Very little has been done by policymakers to provide incentives to these areas and in-depth studies of these sectors are necessary to consider the potential and devise appropriate policy to encourage technology transfer and expansion.

Finally the importance of education and literacy, in both Bengali and English, was underscored. This would encourage foreign investment and allow Bangladesh to be integrated better into the global economy.

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### **Recommendations of the group charged with: Education and Human Resource Development**

Bangladesh, more than any other country, has to turn

its abundant population into productive human resources in order to fulfill its vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How the education system can be re-directed to help fight poverty, promote human development, create the conditions for life with human dignity for all, and face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is, therefore, a paramount concern. The breakaway discussion group agreed on the following recommendations:

### ***Establishing a Unified System of Primary and Secondary Education***

Inequality in access and opportunities is the defining feature of the present education system. To overcome the divisions and discrimination in educational provisions, reflected in separate streams of government, non-government, private, and English medium schools and madrasas, at both primary and secondary levels, a unified general education system should be introduced with a common core curriculum, learning objectives and minimum required standards regarding teachers, facilities and learning materials. The unified approach and standards should be applied to all institutions, government and non-government, including quomi and aliya madrasas and English medium schools, and to all students attending any type of educational institutions.

### ***Promoting a New and Effective Pedagogy***

To equip children with the necessary skills, capabilities, and creativity essential for the information society and the knowledge economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the didactic and teacher-centred pedagogy must be replaced by a more learner-centred and active teaching learning process. Sound formative and summative assessment tools and techniques should be used to assess the performance of students, teachers, institutions and geographical units and to diagnose and remedy deficiencies in the system. Pedagogic techniques that recognize different abilities of learners and challenge the gifted learners must be promoted. Appropriate technologies should be used to improve quality of instruction, enrich the learning experience for all, and upgrade and support teachers. ICT tools such as TV, VCD, mobile phone, and computers may be leveraged for “anytime-anywhere” learning, thereby saving time and cost and allowing flexible learner-centered schedules. A dedicated educational Bangladesh Television (BTV) channel for interactive educational programs should become a reality without delay.

### ***Making Education Truly Inclusive to Serve Children with Special Needs***

Different needs and circumstances of learners defined by their economic status, geography, gender, ethnic and language background, parents' educational level, and similar social, economic and family background should be recognized and educational provisions, curricula, and the school program should be appropriately adapted. Educational institutions should ensure full access of children with disabilities and special needs.

### ***Enhancing Competence, Performance, Rewards and Recognition of Teachers***

Skills and performance of teachers hold the key to better outcome from the education system. Human resource policy and practices including the career ladder should facilitate professional development and promote performance standards of teaching personnel. A workable approach to increase remuneration for teaching and linking it with performance is to design remuneration structure to allow for more differentiation in teaching positions (for example, entry-level assistant teachers, teachers, senior/master teachers/team leaders/assistant headmaster and headmaster) with promotion and salary raises tied to clearly established and enforced performance criteria. Special rewards or bonuses can be tied to group performance at the institution. The key role of the head master of the primary and secondary school as an educational leader and manager with enhanced authority at the school level should be recognized and commensurate status and salary granted.

### ***Making Education Governance and Management Accountable and Effective***

Weak accountability in governance and ineffective management are the main obstacles to many initiatives underway for educational reform and development. Four areas demand attention in this respect.

- A structure of decentralization of education management should be developed which will assign central authorities such as the Ministry, Directorates and Boards broad policy and regulatory responsibilities, while empowering zilla and upazilla education authorities, training institutions and schools to make decisions regarding activities, operations and personnel within a framework of principles and guidelines.

- A permanent National Commission on Education for pre-tertiary education composed of distinguished and respected representatives of the major stakeholders – the civil society, the academic community, and the government education establishment – answerable directly to the National Parliament should be established. The Commission should be a statutory body with functions and status specified in a national education law.
- A national Education Law should be enacted as a comprehensive legal framework for implementing the constitutional provision of providing free and compulsory education to all boys and girls. Such a law would spell out rights, responsibilities and obligations of citizens and government agencies at different levels, principles of decentralization and accountability, regulatory framework for different types of education programs and institutions, and principles of defining and protecting public interest in education.
- A consensus has to be built regarding political parties restraining themselves from involving students and teachers and their organizations in partisan politics; educational decision-making including those on appointments, transfers and promotion should be protected from extraneous political influence; appropriate legal provisions and rules for election for the parliament and other people's representative bodies should help protect education institutions from undue political influence. Codes of conduct for teachers and students at the national level and each institution should be developed and enforced.

### ***Ensuring Adequate Resources for Quality Education***

A threshold level of resources must be ensured for achieving the quality and equity goals in education. Measures should be taken to double the share of GNP and of government budget for education in the next ten years. Medium term budgetary framework (3 to 5 years) needs to be developed for both development and recurrent expenditures in education in order to achieve the target for ensuring adequate resources for education. Public subvention and incentives to educational institutions should be linked to commitment and fulfillment of agreed performance criteria and targets; greater autonomy and control of resources can be offered to institutions that prove their capability to use resources effectively. Schools should be given incentives to generate local funds.

Team Leader: Manzoor Ahmed  
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**Recommendations of the group charged with:  
Infrastructure**

The key points made by the panel on Environment, Energy, Infrastructure and Water Resources are as follows:

**Environment**

- Industrial effluents must be discharged properly. Bangladesh already has strict regulations in place but it is the implementation that is lacking.
- Deforestation has become a major problem in Bangladesh. The forest area has been reduced to only 6 percent. Besides, deforestation has adversely affected the lives of indigenous people and further deforestation must be stopped immediately.
- General decay of the rivers of Bangladesh must be addressed. For smaller rivers, dredging should be considered.

**Energy**

- A Comprehensive Energy Strategy is essential for Bangladesh. Rural energy sector comprising of solar, wind and other alternative renewable sources should be emphasized. NRBs should be encouraged to invest in alternate energy sources.
- A Center for Energy Excellence should be established to allow for growth of local expertise as well as NRB participations.

**Infrastructure**

- Spatial distribution of major infrastructures such as roadways, electricity, water supply and sanitation should be encouraged.
- A cell under the Planning Commission should be established to implement and monitor the proper distribution of major infrastructures.

**Water Resources:**

The Padma Barrage and Bridge should be built together. ECNEC has approved the construction of the Padma Bridge at Mawa at a cost of \$1.5 billion. This vision should be extended to build the Padma Barrage and Bridge together to save at least \$500 million in construction cost as well as to achieve the following unparallel benefits:

- Provide surface irrigation to 1.5 million hectares (Mha) in the Ganges Basin and 1.0 Mha in the Jamuna Basin to increase the food production by

7.5 million tons.

- Resuscitate the major tributaries viz. the Gorai, the Old Brahmaputra and the Dhaleswari and reduce the flooding by diverting flood waters to the resuscitated rivers.
- Generate dependable 600 MW of hydropower.
- Arrest saline water intrusion and save the Sunderbans, a World Heritage Site.
- Provide drinking water to Dhaka and Khulna through the Dhaleswari and Gorai Rivers, respectively.

It is, therefore, imperative that the government of Bangladesh immediately take steps to incorporate the Padma Barrage into the Bridge Project.

Bangladesh suffers from catastrophic floods almost every five to seven years causing numerous deaths and extensive destruction. Long-term, expensive structural solutions are beyond the means of Bangladesh. Instead, Bangladesh should concentrate on non-structural solutions centered around flood forecasting and flood-proofing of the houses.

Team Leader: Sufian A. Khondker, PhD, PE  
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**Recommendations of the group charged with:  
Health, Population and Non-governmental  
Organizations**

The breakaway session on health, population and NGOs was lively and many sub-topics were covered, none to the extent the group would have liked. The session was but one hour; hence our results were limited.

Before addressing each of the three areas of concern, there was consensus among the group that certain general conditions would have to be met for the recommendations to be viable in Bangladesh.

The first and most pressing concern was the historical influence of corruption in Bangladesh. It was felt that much of the corruption would need to be alleviated for the recommendations to be viable in this most deserving nation. Although the caretaker government offers hope, it was recognized that already there are reports of corruption in the caretaker government. Therefore, the first recommendation is that corruption ought to be forcefully addressed and hopefully eliminated to the extent possible.

Our second recommendation is to establish three task forces, each to address one of the issues: health, population and NGOs. These should be ongoing task forces, each of which is staffed with appropriate professionals and non-professionals who are willing to commit the necessary time and talent to insure quality and effectiveness.

A third recommendation centers on persons with disabilities in Bangladesh. Rather than considering persons with disabilities as a burden to the nation and a possible impediment to development, it is recommended that the experience of Bangladesh Protibandhi Kallyan Somity (BPKS) be carefully studied as an example of how the talents and commitment of persons with disabilities can be exploited not only to contribute to the nation's development, but also to provide leadership in Bangladesh's development and its assuming its rightful position among the family of nations worldwide. The input of people with disabilities should be sought across the entire spectrum of development issues and certainly not limited to those dealing specifically with disability issues. With these recommendations, the discussion of the main subject matters ensued. Given the limitations of time, the health sector is elucidated the most.

### **Health**

Health and human productivity are intertwined. There is a bi-directional relationship between health and economic development. In this regard, the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health (2001) asserted that "Improving the health and longevity of the poor is an end in itself, a fundamental goal of economic development." The Commission also stressed that while it is generally assumed that good health is a direct outcome of strong economic development, there is also the opposite evidence: that strong economic development depends on a healthy population. The positive externalities of keeping a nation's human resources healthy are significant for both developed and developing countries.

The World Health Report (2000) also urges health care systems to deliver good health to the population, design responsive health services, and ensure fair payment systems. International agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) are also making serious demands today on health care services by stressing accountability, quality, cost effectiveness, access, and sustainability, all focusing on the need to design more effective and efficient health programs.

The group felt that there is much to be accomplished

in this sector. Our first recommendation is that, in order to bring greater access to health services and therefore improved health to all Bangladeshis, a much greater emphasis is absolutely necessary on primary health care services. Such a focus would ensure that many health problems are tackled before they grow, while others are prevented altogether. Primary health care must begin at the village level and can often be offered through the services of the villagers and community health workers trained at a basic level, patterned after the "promotoras" of Mexico. This Mexican model has been very successfully replicated in the USA under the community health aide program.

In line with our recommendation for an emphasis and concomitant financial commitment to primary health care services, the planning, oversight and responsibility for those services must be decentralized and placed with local officials in the areas served. Our belief is that greater responsibility is taken and more appropriate services are offered when there is local accountability.

We also contend that improving tertiary (curative) care in Bangladesh requires attention to the issues of quality, access and costs. Improvement of managerial practices is key here that can be bolstered by the establishment of health administration education so that a specially trained workforce instead of generalists would be geared to the management and administration of health systems (hospitals).

It also important to bring in the patients' voice to improve health services by having them rate various service features regularly. These features include doctors, nurses, tangibles, process features, reliability, responsiveness, physical environment, etc.

At the same time, to ensure proper delivery of health, additional organizational and extra-organizational issues must also be addressed to improve the healthcare system. For example, studies are needed to examine the influence of political elements, commitment of the higher authorities of the Health Ministry (especially those in the Directorate of Health), the cooperation and coordination achieved with affiliated ministries such as the Ministry of Establishment (for recruitment purposes) and the Ministry of Finance (that makes funds available), and the role and quality of involvement of the development partners (e.g., The World Bank, USAID, WHO, UNFPA, etc.).

Changes in attitudes and practices at these higher

tiers of the health design and delivery system, where human, financial, technical, and policy matters are negotiated, is essential for the healthcare system to respond optimally and provide the needed services to respond best to patient needs. More specifically, the influence of party politics (who gets hired, who approves purchases), corruption at the Health ministry and Directorate of Health (who gets foreign or local training, who gets posted where, who is recommended for promotion, etc.), conditions imposed by the Ministry of Establishment and Ministry of Finance (in matters of recruitment, purchase of expensive diagnostics equipment, and related budgetary matters), and the purported interfering, imposing and intrasigent nature of the development partners also need to be examined; failures at these levels have significant ramifications for any improvements at the service delivery level. An example is the imbroglio in Bangladesh between the development agencies and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in regard to the right approach to healthcare service delivery that has led to much bickering, conflict and stoppage of funds for staff salaries and purchases of essential drugs (Haq 2003; The Daily Star 2006). Many feel this has seriously undermined the health and family planning program in Bangladesh. Unless these intertwined and networked structures of power and influence see eye to eye and demonstrate a spirit of collaboration and goal orientation to fulfill their mission of alleviating Bangladesh's health challenges, changes at the service delivery level may remain seriously encumbered.

Concern was also expressed among the group over the availability of legal drugs over the counter, drugs that should be taken only with prescriptions issued by properly trained medical professionals. The fact that any person can walk into a pharmacy and buy prescription drugs without proper prescriptions and the fact that many of these drugs are not manufactured to recommended standards were causes of great concern. We recommend immediate government attention to the development of a proper system for the appropriate distribution of these drugs.

The role and importance of the pharmaceutical sector was also acknowledged. This sector faces many challenges. For example,

- Raw materials are imported because of insufficient local production.
- No accredited labs exist for bioavailability/bioequivalence (BABE) testing.
- Few clinical research organization are there to conduct clinical trials.

- Limited scientific resource are in place for reverse engineering for API production.
- Individual companies may have attained some level of success but overall limited collaboration and cooperation with each other and academic institutions.

To address these issues, the following recommendations were offered:

- Political stability and willingness to change.
- Evidence based practice is needed requiring collection of data through research.
- There is a need for better and focused education and training of healthcare providers.
- API park must be established; this stalled public/private initiative must be revived.
- Bangladesh can benefit from the opportunity provided by TRIPS to manufacture generics.
- Provide incentive and bring overseas expertise - engage NRB Diaspora.
- BABE study laboratories and clinical research organizations must be established.
- Scientific collaboration and joint ventures must be aggressively pursued.
- Contract manufacturing should also be explored with MNCs.

It was also observed that medical students who perform their required social service for the government are often exploited by existing physicians as “free labor” in their own practices. In essence they are placed in physicians’ offices without pay and the financial benefits of their services accrue to the physicians for whom they work. There was strong consensus among our group that these students should be placed in areas, usually rural areas, where health services are severely lacking and that they should be paid for their social service; certainly their service must not be of financial benefit to individual health care professionals.

As our final health recommendation, we feel there are great opportunities for the development of income generating possibilities for Bangladeshis with the introduction of health promoting crops of both herbal and non-herbal varieties. Bangladesh, with its great fertile lands, holds great promise for becoming a leader worldwide in the development, production, utilization and exportation of such crops.

#### ***Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):***

There has been a proliferation of NGOs across Bangladesh. The myriad of such organizations makes it virtually impossible for funding organizations to

determine the relative merit of those seeking financial and/or technical support. It is recommended that there be a greater role of the government in ensuring that those NGOs that are recognized and certified are indeed worthy of support and are indeed having a relatively significant and positive impact on those they purport to serve. With the government's greater oversight and assurance of quality and validity of needs addressed, the job of determining which organizations and/or projects to fund becomes simpler for the funding bodies and ensures that priority services are provided where and to whom they are most needed.

Further, the group recommends that NGOs be monitored for their provision of critical services at the grassroots level. Often the rural population and marginalized sub-populations are least served by NGOs, thus they miss those in greatest need. Better government monitoring will ensure that NGOs are properly run, funds are properly utilized and services address the greatest needs and are of top quality.

### **Population**

Strong concern was expressed by one member of the group that often the family planning methods offered village women are simply not acceptable or appropriate and therefore not used. The group's recommendation is that local, grassroots women and men be involved in designing family planning strategies and methods for their areas.

Finally, the group drew a logical and natural relationship between family planning and health, resulting in the recommendation that all planning be done in a holistic manner, carefully recognizing this relationship.

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### **Endnotes**

1. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 6<sup>th</sup> Printing, 2003, pp. 3-102.
2. *Ibid.* 77.
3. The U.S. Consul General in East Pakistan, Archer Blood, used the term to define the nature of killings of Bengali civilians by Pakistani army and their local collaborators during March-December 1971. Based on interviews with

Consul General Blood on April 7, 1971, and May 18, 1974. See also, Archer K Blood, *The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh: Memoirs of an American Diplomat*, UPL, 2002.

4. Most Bangladesh Newspapers, December 27, 2003. See for a detailed coverage, *The Daily Star*, December 27 and 28, 2003.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Human Rights Watch*, February 2008, Volume 20, No. 1 (C)
7. *The Wall Street Journal*, June 28-29, 2008; *The New York Times*, June 29, 2008.
8. Milton C. Cummings, Jr. and David Wise, *Democracy Under Pressure*, New York: Harcourt Brace Publishers, 2008, pp. 797-ff. There is no mention of local government in the US Constitution. Powers are distributed between the federal government and state governments with concurrent powers exercised by both. Powers not specifically designated as such are reserved for the states and the people of the United States (10<sup>th</sup> Amendment of US Constitution). The 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment provided the constitutional basis of Home Rule, whereby states could delegate a wide range of powers to local governments in order for them to make their own forms of local government with needed authority to enact rules, levy taxes and elect/select local officials to run the local administration.
9. Zillur R. Khan, "Ideology and Internal Dynamics of South Asian Regional Cooperation", in Zillur R. Khan (ed.). *SAARC and the Superpowers*, United Press Ltd., 1991.

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## **Dedication**

The success of the conference was the culmination of the work of a core group of colleagues from Bangladesh Development Initiative ([www.bdiusa.org](http://www.bdiusa.org)) and Democracy and Development in Bangladesh Forum, working collaboratively towards a common goal: to help make a difference in the political, social, and economic lives of the people of Bangladesh. The support of the Ash Institution of Democratic Governance and Innovation, Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University was also invaluable as was the help of the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington DC that extended its help in a befitting manner. The US Embassy in Dhaka, Bangladesh provided moral support and assistance with visa applications. The sponsors of the conference were The American Institute of Bangladesh Studies in USA, and Citibank, Prime Bank Limited and MGH Group from Bangladesh.

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