Mankind has always been in search of new and better homes. Thus, cities, towns and villages grow, flourish and wither away. In the process societies forever demand and produce all kinds of goods and services, though, never satisfied we ask for things more different.

Housing visibly shapes the way people live, work and innovate. Today housing is recognized the world over as the main engine that runs the economy, creating work not only for masons and managers, accountants and architects, but also for makers and sellers of building materials.

Asset Developments & Holdings Ltd is dedicated to build a beautiful tomorrow for the people of Bangladesh. Asset’s vision is to achieve excellence in providing living comfort and to attain leadership in project quality and completion management.
With the scheduled delivery this fall of two new Boeing 777-300ERs, the partnership between Biman Bangladesh Airlines and Boeing soars even higher. At Boeing, we’re proud to be part of this exciting chapter of growth and success for all of Bangladesh.
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The National Anthem: Amar Shonar Bangla (My Golden Bengal)

My Bengal of gold, I love you.  
Forever your skies, your air set my heart in tune as if it were a flute,
In spring, oh mother mine, the fragrance from your mango-groves makes me wild with joy-
Ah, what a thrill!
In Autumn, oh mother mine, in the full blossomed paddy field,
I have seen spread all over sweet – smiles!  
Ah, what a beauty, what shades, what an affection, and what tenderness!
What a quilt have you spread at the feet of banyan trees and along the banks of rivers!
Oh mother mine, words from your lips are like nectar to my ears!
Ah, what a thrill!
If sadness, oh mother mine, casts a gloom on your face, my eyes are filled with tears!

Original in Bangla by Rabindranath Tagore.  
Translated by Professor Syed Ali Ahsan
Chief Patron

H.E. Mr. Akramul Qader
Ambassador of Bangladesh to the United States of America and
State Minister

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Published on
26 March 2012

Printed by

ATM Ashraful Islam
Mohona Net Bangladesh
135, Arambagh, Dhaka-1000
Tel: 88-01819212563

Published by

Embassy of Bangladesh
3510 International Drive, NW Washington, DC 20008
Tel: 1-202-244-0183, Fax:1-202-244-2771,
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The editorial board is grateful to all the esteemed contributors of articles. In some cases, minor changes have been made to accommodate maximum number of articles in the stipulated space.
The Embassy Team

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Back Row from Left
Mr. Nirupam Dev Nath, First Secretary, Mr. M. Shafiqul Islam, Commercial Counselor, Mr. MJH J Abed, Counselor, Mr. Muhammad Nazmul Hoque, Counselor and Head of Chancery
Bangladesh at a glance

Official Name
People’s Republic of Bangladesh

Capital
Dhaka

Currency
Taka (BDT)

Geography

Area
55,598 sq miles (1,47,570 Sq.Km)

Comparative
Slightly smaller than the state of Iowa or Wisconsin

Location
South Asia, On three sides: East, North & West –India, South-East: Myanmar, South: Bay of Bengal

Land boundary
4,246 km

Bordering Countries
India: 4,053 km, Myanmar: 193 km

Climate
Tropical: mild Winter (October to March): Summer (March to June): Rainy Monsoon (June to October)

Temperature
High- 104 degrees (during summer) Fahrenheit, low 40 degrees (in winter)

Terrain
Mostly flat alluvial plain; hilly in the South-East

Standard Time
GMT +6 hours

People

Population size
142.319 million (2011, BBS)

Comparative
Bangladesh ranks 7th in terms of population size. Have more people than Russia.

Language
Bangla (5th most spoken language in the world, about 250 million people speak Bangla)

Main Religions
Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity.

Male-Female Ratio
100: 100.3 (2011, BBS)

Population Density/sq.km
964 (2011, BBS)

Crude Birth Rate
Crude Birth Rate 22.53 (Per 1000 Population in 2012)

Crude Death Rate
Crude Death Rate 5.71 ( Per 1000 Population in 2012)

Rate of Poverty (%)
31.5% (2011)

Governance

Governance
Parliamentary democracy

Legal system
Based on English common law

Suffrage
18 years of age: universal

Constitution
Written form

Head of Government
Prime Minister

Head of State
President

Education and Health

Primary education
Compulsory and universal

School enrolment (%)

Life expectancy at birth
68.21 years (male), 71.98 years (female) (2012)

Literacy rate (%)
55.9 (UNDP 2011)

Infant Mortality rate
50.73 (per 1000 Live Birth), (Below 1 year of age), 2010

Total Fertility rate per Women (15-49)
2.4 (2006)

Persons per Hospital Bed
(including Dispensary)
1860 (2008)

Persons Per Registered Physician
2860 (2008)

Safe Drinking Water User (%)
97.6 (2006)

Sanitary Latrine User (%)
52.6 (2006)

Economy

Size of GDP
100.00 billion US $ (2010-11)

Share of GDP
Agriculture: 18.4%, Industry:28.6%, Services: 53% ( 2011)
Rate of GDP growth
6.7 % (2010-11)

Foreign Currency Reserve
US $ 10.98 Billion (November 2011)

Current account balance
US $ 952 million (2007-08)

Per capita GDP
US $ 664 (2010-2011)

Per capita National income
US $ 750 (2011)

Domestic savings
18.99 (as % of GDP, 2009-10)

National savings
28.75 (as % of GDP, 2009-10)

Total investment
24.96 (Public-4.77, Private-20.19) (as % of GDP, 2009-10)

Foreign Direct Investment
US $.913 Billion (2010)

Total number of Export Processing Zones (EPZ) 08

Total investments in EPZs 1935.86 million US $ (2011)

Export earnings
US $ 16 billion (2009-10)

Exports-commodities
Ready Made Garments (RMG), Leather, Frozen Fish, Sea Food, Pharmaceuticals, Cements, Jute and Jute Goods, etc.

Exports-partners
US 24.9%, Germany 12.8%, UK 9.8%, France 5% (2006)

Imports-partners
China 17.7%, India 12.5%, Kuwait 7.9%, Singapore 5.5%, Hong Kong 4.1% (2006)

Import payments
9.00 billion (oct-dec, 2011)

Agriculture-products

Industries
Garments, Spinning, Ship building, Textiles, Jute, Tea processing, Newsprint, Cement, Fertilizer, Light engineering, Sugar, Ceramic, Fish processing, IT solutions, Pharmaceuticals.

Debt –external
$ 20.25 billion (31 December 2007 est.)

Market size
Even a conservative estimate presents a growing middle class of 30 million people (15 to 20% of total pop.), which is bigger than the combined population of Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore.

Endowment
In addition to huge reserve of natural gas, Bangladesh has a pool of easily trainable human resources. Cost of operation, both in terms of tariffs and wages, is one of the lowest in the world.

Fiscal year
1 July – 30 June

Society

Structure
Liberal Democratic Society

Personality of people
Warm and hospitable

Seaport
Chittagong and Mongla

International Airports
Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet

Domestic Airports
Jossore, Cox's bazaar, Saidpur, Rajshahi and Barisal

Radio and Television
Transmission covers the entire country. Numerous private channels are in operation.

Telephone per 100 people (BBS: 2010)
Land phone- 2.07
Cell phone- 63.74

Internet
Broadband, easily available, connected to submarine cable

Popular sports
Football, Cricket, Hockey, Kabadi, Swimming, Chess

Tourist attraction
World’s longest unbroken 120 km, sea- beach of Cox’s Bazar, Colorful tribal life of hill tracts, centuries old historical sites. (Some are pilgrimage of Buddhists, Hindus etc.) at Dhaka, Paharpur, Mainamati, Mohastangar; Sundarbans-the home of the Royal Bengal Tiger and largest mangrove forest in the world (a world heritage site), Beautiful Tea Gardens, River life etc.
Portrait of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman
Artist: Shahjahan Ahmed Bikash
March 26 is our great Independence and National Day. On the eve of the day, I convey my heartfelt greetings and felicitations to the countrymen living at home and abroad.

The historic Independence Day is a glorious day in our national life. We achieved our long-cherished Independence through nine-month long struggle and supreme sacrifices of millions. On this solemn day, I pray my deep homage to the martyrs who laid down their lives in the war of liberation in 1971. I pray to the Almighty for the salvation of those departed souls.

On this very memorable day, I recall with profound respect Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who proclaimed country’s Independence at the early hours on March 26, 1971. Responding to his clarion call, the people from all walks of life participated in the war of liberation and achieved victory through armed struggle. I also recall with deep respect our four National Leaders; valiant freedom-fighters and organizers who rendered their dedicated efforts and enthusiastic support that accelerated the achievement of our victory. I also remember with deep respect the contributions of late Sher-e-Bangla A. K. Fazlul Haque, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani who inspired our people at various stages for attaining country’s self-sovereignty. The contributions of those valiant sons of the soil would be ever written in the history of our Independence.

One of the prime objectives of our hard-earned Independence was to build a happy and prosperous Bangladesh. Keeping that in mind, the Government is rendering untiring efforts in materializing the objectives of Independence. With the span of time, we have achieved some significant progresses in the fields of agriculture, education, health, rural infrastructure, communication, ICT, SME, youth & sports, women and children, women empowerment etc. at national level. At the same time we have also attained notable achievements in corporate sector including the areas of readymade garments, pharmaceuticals, ceramic and ship-building industry. The Government is also very sincere to establish Rule of Law, Human Rights in the country. Our achievement at international arena is also praiseworthy. Yet, we have to go a long way for achieving the desired goals of independence and building a happy and prosperous Bangladesh. I believe concerted efforts from all strata irrespective of party affiliation are imperative in this regard.

The people of our country are democracy-loving. Without institutionalization of democracy, the overall development is hard to attain. Tolerance, fortitude and respectful to other’s opinion are the pre-conditions for flourishing democracy. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to maintain patience, forbearance at all level and to be respectful to other’s opinion in a democratic pluralism. Let us make our Jatiya Sangsad a centre of excellence in solving our national issues through discussion. I am confident, everybody irrespective of party affiliation would play responsible role in fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of our common people by playing their due roles.

The present Government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has declared ‘Vision 2021’ with a view to attaining ‘Golden Bangla’ dreamt by Bangabandhu. I believe people from all strata of life would contribute to build an IT-based happy and prosperous Bangladesh by materializing the ‘Vision’ at the Golden Jubilee of Independence in 2021.

On this Independence Day, I urge all, living at home and abroad, to work unitedly imbued with the spirit of War of Liberation to expedite economic self-reliance and democratic advancement of the country.

May the Almighty be with us.
Khoda Hafez, May Bangladesh Live Forever.

Md. Zillur Rahman
I convey my heartiest greetings to my countrymen as well as to all expatriate Bangalees on the occasion of the great Independence and National Day of Bangladesh.

The 26th March is a glorious day in our national life. On this great day, I pay my deep homage to the 3 million martyrs and 200 thousand women who lost their innocence in the War of Liberation in 1971.

I recall with deep gratitude the great leader of our liberation struggle, the greatest Bangalee of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, under whose dynamic leadership we earned our great Independence.

I also pay my humble tributes to the four national leaders and the valiant freedom fighters, who had fought against the Pakistani occupation forces to free our beloved motherland.

I extend my sympathies to those who had lost their near and dear ones, and were subjected to brutal torture and subjugation during the war. I recall with gratitude our foreign friends who had extended their whole hearted support and cooperation for the cause of our liberation.

The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman proclaimed the independence of Bangladesh at the first hour of the 26th March 1971 after the occupation forces launched sudden attack on the innocent and unarmed Bangalees on the black night of the 25th March 1971. Bangabandhu's proclamation was spread all over the country through telegrams, tele-printers and EPR wireless. At each and every district and subdivision, Awami League’s leaders and workers publicized the declaration widely through mikes. The international media also had circulated Bangabandhu’s proclamation of Independence. Under the brave and dauntless leadership of Bangabandhu, we earned the ultimate victory on the 16th December 1971 after a 9-month bloody war.

The independence earned through huge bloodbath and sacrifice is our greatest achievement. To ensure that this achievement remains meaningful, the spirit of our great liberation war should be reached to every nook and corner of the country. Cherishing the true history of the liberation war close to our hearts, we would have to go ahead in achieving the objectives of the Charter of Change by building a Bangladesh, free from corruption, mal-governance, terrorism, hunger and poverty.

The present Awami League government has been implementing huge development programmes in all sectors, including agriculture, education, health, law and order, information technology, energy and power and communications. The defeated anti-liberation, communal and identified reactionary forces are trying to undo the democratic and development process of our beloved country at a time when our government had executed the verdict of Bangabandhu’s assassination case, and is holding the trial of the war criminals.

On this auspicious day of our independence, I urge the countrymen to remain united to foil the ill-designed plots of the anti-democratic and anti-liberation forces against the government and the people.

We have been striving hard to establish Bangladesh as a poverty, hunger and illiteracy free modern Digital Bangladesh by the Golden Jubilee year of our Independence through implementing ‘Vision 2021’. I hope that all citizens of our country would engage themselves with their utmost sincerity, honesty and dedication to build Bangladesh a prosperous and prestigious country in comity of nations.

I am confident that Insha-Allah, with our united efforts, we would surely achieve our golden Bangladesh as envisioned by the Father of the Nation.

Joi Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever

Sheikh Hasina
Today, 26 March 2012 Bangladesh celebrates its 41st Anniversary of Independence and Sovereignty. It is the 4th such occasion on which I am privileged to address you as your Foreign Minister.

The Bangalee nation has travelled a long distance from its painful birth, from the sacrifices made by its men and women, young and old, as a nation united by the common cause of exercising sovereign statehood. In the wake of the assumption of responsibility as a government by the people's representatives under a free and fair election a little over three years ago, the Awami League Government, together with the 14 Party Alliance, has made giant strides towards fulfilling our dreams. Most significantly, we have vigorously pursued the four fundamental principles of our Constitution and of our State policy.

We have launched our pursuit of building a Sonar Bangla. We are able to envisage middle – income, digital; knowledge based vision of Bangladesh in 2021. We have demonstrated intent and ability to force partnerships with our neighbours and far beyond. We are deeply involved in the society of multilateralism, through global and regional commitments. We are involved in social and economic restructuring through the empowerment of women and children; we have embarked on fashioning inter-generational equity; we continue to address ourselves to cooperating with developing countries in the framework of a global economic and political order.

We stand on the threshold of redressing the injustices inflicted upon us, historically and in more recent times. We are embarked in the process of redressing the imbalance in the relationship between developed and developing countries. Our policy and purpose to claim our entitlements occasioned by the factum of climate change is a major feature of our foreign policy. We seek to ensure better terms of trade with the United States and the European Union whilst at the same time pursuing greater fairness and equity in bilateral relations with our more resourceful neighbours and special friends. We have vastly improved our relations with our immediate neighbor Myanmar, on such important issues as the Rohingya issue and in economic and cultural spheres.

We continue, with new attention and new measures, to serve our men and women who work abroad, now numbering about 8 million, and increasing every year, whose contribution to our economy and welfare has provided us with a new dimension of the sovereign state that they represent. Our ever evolving policy to serve our expatriate workers has brought about hope for a better future for their welfare than just the contribution that they render to the quality of life we enjoy within the country.

Bangladesh is now a role model for fighting poverty and extremism, empowering women, disaster management and in coping with the challenges posed by global warming and climate change. Bangladesh is often cited as one of the eleven emerging economies of the world. It has achieved remarkable success and recognition in the social sector. The winning of the MDG award for achieving targeted reduction in infant mortality and the UN South South Award for the use of modern technology in the development of women and child health by the Prime Minister bear testimony in this regard.

Since the Awami League assumed responsibility for conducting the affairs of the State, we have brought a judicial closure to the assassination case of Bangabandhu and his family and although some of the convicted continue to remain fugitive abroad, we are encouraged to believe that the horrors of impunity are being addressed. We have initiated the difficult process of bringing to justice war criminals through fair trials consistent with high standards of fair trial under international law. We have made much progress in the cases against the BDR mutineers who threatened to shock and derail the Government within weeks of its assumption of state responsibility. Following Judgments of the apex Court, we have undertaken constitutional legislation, through the Fifteenth Amendment, to remedy the aberrations inflicted by military dictators and usurpers upon the Constitution. In Parliament, we have adopted significant legislation that has rendered the Constitution consistent with our founding principles of Statehood. We believe that we have made deep inroads to reverse the culture of impunity which had besieged the nation since the assassination of the Father of the Nation. This will effectively lay down a bedrock for the return, and advent, to the Rule of Law and Rule under the Constitution.
On foreign policy issues, the Government has continued to pursue its policy of friendship to all nations. Coupled with its elected character and the massive mandate it has received in the last general elections, Bangladesh now enjoys excellent relations with the outside world. The resolution of some long running issues with India and considerable progress to solve remaining ones, the successful holding of the climate Vulnerable Forum Ministerial Meeting in Dhaka, the unanimous adoption of the Hon’ble Prime Minister’s “people’s empowerment” model at the Second Committee of the UN, Bangladesh’s election to a record number of UN and International bodies, the decision to establish the Permanent Secretariat of the BIMSTEC in Dhaka, the prompt repatriation of about 37000 Bangladesh nationals from Libya etc., securing the return of 35 Bangladesh nationals, including 26 crew members, seized by Somali pirates and the release and safe return of 7 Bangladesh nationals from Afghanistan, are the hallmarks of the foreign policy pursued by the present Government during last three years. The winning of ‘South South Award’ during the 66th UNGA and ‘MDG Award’ by the Hon’ble Prime Minister during the 65th UNGA for achieving impressive progress are eloquent testimonies in this regard. Without prejudice to our other achievements, we have been able to participate meaningfully in an ever expanding multilateral world and contribute to world peace-keeping efforts through the UN. Our efforts have resulted in Bangladesh being called a stabilizing State in the region.

Then, of course, we have enjoyed high success in pursuing our interests in our maritime claims. Ever since the birth of our nation, our entitlement to the territorial sea, the Exclusive economic Zone and the continental Shelf appeared to be theoretical rights. They were, indeed, neglected and Bangladesh was unable to exercise sovereignty and sovereign rights over these territories contemplated in our Constitution. Callous neglect by successive Governments, military and quasi military, had deprived our people over the resources over these areas. Our Government, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has successfully settled our maritime entitlements with our co-littoral state, Myanmar through arbitration at ITLOS. Not only we have been able to settle this issue, we have settled it through peaceful means and respect for international law and the principles laid down in the UN Charter to which we are committed.

That although are maritime entitlements remain unsettled with India, we have every reason to believe that we will be able to settle our claims peacefully and successfully through the arbitration process we have initiated at the International court of Arbitration and Bangladesh will emerge with vast new resources hitherto untapped and unavailed.

I wish to highlight that continuing engagement by, and efforts of, our Diaspora serve enormously towards the achievement of our foreign policy objectives. The introduction of MRP and MRV have been introduced in almost half of the Bangladesh Missions abroad, together with the on going process to do so in the remaining Missions, reflects the high degree of success in that area. To find out business potentials and to aggressively explore employment for our nationals, the Government has sent fact-finding Missions to Latin America and Africa for the first time. We are planning to open new missions abroad soon to support our commercial drive and at a time when our export volume, remittance flow and inbound FDI are witnessing an upward trend.

I take this opportunity to thank all our officials and staff at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and our Missions abroad who have devoted themselves to achieving our foreign policy objectives. I also congratulate the Bangladesh Diaspora who has lent buoyancy of the economy of their country of origin as well as to their host countries.

No message, at this stage of our national life, can be complete without invoking the source of our inspiration, namely, the inspiration imbibed by Bangabandhu, the Father of our Bangalee Nation. Our four national leaders who, in his absence, led us during the nine months to our ultimate victory, the martyrs who laid down their lives, our Freedom Fighters, who had risked their lives against a modern ruthless and genocidal army. I recall their cause and contribution in the great struggle for our independence and statehood. With the entire nation, I also recall, with the highest regard, those who suffered in silence, moved from shelter to shelter within the country, or took refuge across the border in India, without assurances of food or money on their person, and to those who lost their closest relatives and friends. I take the opportunity to remind ourselves that their will and aspirations embodied in our Constitution will provide the basis of all our endeavours.

Joy Bangla
Joy Bangabandhu

(Dr. Dipu Moni, MP)
From the Desk of the Ambassador

Bangladesh became free by shedding an ocean of blood during the war of liberation in 1971. On the occasion of the historic Independence Day, I pay homage to the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman under whose clarion call our valiant freedom fighters took up arms and liberated the motherland. I recall the supreme sacrifices of all war heroes as well as our mothers and sisters who lost their dignity to the invading forces and their local collaborators.

On behalf of my colleagues at the Embassy of Bangladesh in Washington DC, I would like to greet our friends in the USA and the members of the Bangladesh Diaspora who have been contributing to the prosperity of the two friendly countries. It is our delight that some of Bangladesh’s foreign friends—including from the USA—who supported the latter’s cause of freedom in 1971 are being honoured this year through a state ceremony in Dhaka.

I am very happy that—VIBRANT BANGLADESH— the Embassy’s flagship Independence Day publication now leaves behind its fifth year and this occasion coincides with the 40th anniversary of Bangladesh-US diplomatic relations. It contains write-ups on issues pertaining to Bangladesh’s history, politics, economic progress and public policies. We thank the contributors for their valued time and hard work. The support that we have received from our patrons in carrying out this publication is also thankfully acknowledged. I hope, as in the past, they would stand beside us in our future endeavours.

Bangladesh-US partnerships have deepened over the decades due to the shared values of the two friendly peoples and their leaderships. Bangladesh has been lauded for its performance in a range of issues that are also under the focus of the present US administration. The Government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is committed to enhance ties with the USA in both depth and dimension. We hope, as a recognition to Bangladesh’s sustained efforts in issues such as good governance, counter-terrorism, human rights promotion, women empowerment, disaster management, the US authorities would look into the key unresolved matters in bilateral relations such as a duty free and quota free entry for Bangladesh’s readymade garments in the USA and Bangladesh’s inclusion in the Millennium Challenge Corporation. We thank the members of Bangladesh caucus in the US Congress and US officials who have remained active in support of Bangladesh and this Embassy.

We thank the US media who have demonstrated a keen interest in the positive developments taking place in Bangladesh. Leading US newspapers such as the Washington Post, New York Times and Wall Street Journal interviewed Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during her visit to the USA last September and ran stories highlighting Bangladesh’s impressive development journey. To support the Embassy’s outreach programme, its website was reconstructed last year and made more informative and user-friendly. Any visitor of the site can now leave queries. A new database has been inserted in which the members of the Bangladesh expatriate community are requested to sign up and thereby contribute to the process of improving consular services.

Lately we have set up a library at the Embassy. With support from our friends and well wishers we hope to turn it into an important repository of Bangla books in North America. We welcome ideas and contributions from all quarters for its upgradation and expansion.

Machine readable passport (MRP) facilities have successfully been installed in our consular section. We also expect to begin issuance of machine readable visas soon. Online submission of visa applications and request for other consular works are in our consideration. Such moves for a fast and friendly service to our expatriate community are meant to advance the present government’s work plan of materializing a ‘Digital Bangladesh’ by the year 2021.

I put on record my appreciation for all members of the “Vibrant Bangladesh” editorial team for their diligence in bringing out this publication.
The war liberating Bangladesh from the colonial exploitation of Pakistan which unfortunately followed the pattern set by The United Kingdom during its colonial rule is highly significant in the history of the 20th century. The people of Bangladesh proved that even a powerful army supported by The United States of America, the greatest power of the 20th century, could not overcome the strength of justice and truth. A people considered weak and of no account, a country that was labelled a “Basket case” by then U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger proved that tyranny cannot win. The rapid repatriation of 9 million refugees which returned from exile in India to their homes and villages in the new nation of Bangladesh in less than one year seems to have been forgotten and yet was a major achievement of what was probably the largest refugee incident of the 20th century. The rapid resolution of this crisis remains a bright and lasting beacon when one considers the many unresolved refugee situations that presently fester around the world.

Out of the successful fight for freedom by the peoples of Bangladesh has been the emergence of a vibrant new country that has given to all nations of the world and their peoples important and innovative approaches to poverty, health, education and development. Some examples of this are the creation of the concept of microcredit by Mohammed Yunus and the Grameen Bank, or Mr. Fazle Abed and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) which with few resources demonstrated that health and education could be improved rapidly in rural villages. Furthermore, its support for the creation of International Centre for Diarrhoeal Diseases (ICDDR,B), Bangladesh gave the world oral rehydration therapy (ORT) which now saves the lives of about 6 million children globally each year. In addition the ICDDR,B Bangladesh partnership has developed effective and inexpensive oral cholera vaccines, and demonstrated that the best way to reduce population growth is to insure the survival and health of women and children. There are many other important and innovative contributions which Bangladesh has made that continue to improve the health of all nations of the world since its liberation in 1971.
Although the sacrifice of those who risked their lives and fought against what seemed the insurmountable odds of the combined power of the Pakistan military supported by the Nixon-Kissinger administration of the United States, there was also a ground swell of support for the freedom of Bangladesh among citizens of the United States as well as many other countries. Americans helped in many ways. Some took great risks with their careers. Archer Blood and the U.S. Embassy staff in Dhaka signed a telegram to Secretary of State Kissinger stating they not only objected to but actually refused to follow the policies of the Department of State which were supporting the genocide resulting from those policies. They lost their jobs and careers but not their lives. The “Blood Telegram” showed that even U.S. diplomats who must pledge to support and not criticize U.S. foreign policy could shun such policies when they were clearly wrong and causing great harm. Many of us who had worked at the Cholera Research Laboratory (which became ICDDR,B) before and during the war banded together with Bangladeshi friends and colleagues to inform members of the U.S. Congress of the malignant role that the policies of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger were playing in the catastrophe unfolding in Bangladesh. With limited funds we established the Bangladesh Information Center (BIC) which served as a focal point to collect and disseminate current, factual information on what was actually happening on the ground during the war in Bangladesh. Mr. Abul Muhith led the Bangladeshi diplomats who defected from the Embassy of Pakistan during the war. Their diplomatic and political skills and experience increased the impact as they argued the case for Bangladesh freedom to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. The result of these lobbying efforts assisted by BIC led to defeat of Foreign Assistance Act of 1971 and in the subsequent year the Saxbe-Church Amendment provided resources for reconstruction after the war. Many Senators and Congressman were persuaded that the policies of the administration were wrong but Senator Edward Kennedy and Senator Frank Church and their staffs were especially strong in their assistance. Hearings were held by Senator Kennedy in the refugee subcommittee that provided an arena by which the disinformation campaign of the Department of State could be thoroughly discredited by the photographs and eyewitness accounts provided through the BIC and other channels. These hearings proved highly effective in persuading Congress to stop all arms shipments to Pakistan and in fact all foreign assistance.

Many friends of Bangladesh have been celebrated and many have not been recognized as there was immense popular support in the U.S. for the cause of Bangladesh. Demonstrations with fasting were held in Lafayette Park and Pakistani ships laden with arms for Pakistan were blockaded in Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York. An investigative reporter, Tad Szulc of The New York Times photographed arms being shipped to Pakistan aboard ships in New Jersey and made a front page story of what was at the time denied happening by the U.S. government. Many other newspapers presented the facts of the war and its catastrophic consequences for Bangladeshis. The photographs and eyewitness accounts of the actual events which were provided by friends in Bangladesh at great risk provided the information that finally led to a blockade of the U.S. arms and logistics that were supporting the Pakistan army.
There are many stories about events, protests and actions in the U.S. in support of emerging Bangladesh. In several of these I had the opportunity to participate. One that I remember most was receiving a telephone call at home letting me know that several Bangladeshi members of the crew of a Pakistani ship which was docked in Baltimore where I live were going to “jump ship” and request refugee status that night. I and Dr. Norbert Hirschhorn were told to drive down to the port of Baltimore to pick up these crewmen at 11 PM at night. I remember arriving at Fells Point in the Baltimore Harbor and finding five crew members. We picked them up and found them shelter that night and assisted them with the formalities of declaring refugee status. Several of them remain personal friends of mine ever since. Another event involving the Pakistani ships in Baltimore was a blockade organized by the Quakers (American Friends Service Committee) from Philadelphia who mustered a flotilla of canoes and kayaks who paddled out to a large Pakistani freighter suspected of carrying arms to Pakistan to blockade its leaving the port. I paddled a canoe and stayed out long enough that I was not among those arrested on returning to shore. Of special note was the two week fast led by Anne Taylor opposite the White House in Lafayette Park protesting the Nixon-Kissinger Policies. The protest served as a focal point for coalescence of many groups who wished to plead the case for Bangladesh and protest the U.S. policies and “tilt” toward Pakistan.

On the occasion of this 40th anniversary of the victory of Bangladesh over all odds it is appropriate to recognize the many Americans who helped the cause of liberation and recognize their contributions.

This is of particular importance now since Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon and others have already written about the events and continue to attempt to justify the policies they implemented which led to the death of so many of Bangladeshi’s and caused one of the largest refugee events of the 20th century. Fortunately Bangladesh and its friends around the world and in the U.S. proved that with truth and justice on their side those considered weak and of no consequence could overcome the tyranny of arms and power. Their victory gave birth to a vibrant country that continues to make major contributions to global society in health, architecture and engineering, finance, literature and many other areas. Joi Bangla!

Dr. William B. Greenough had been working at the Cholera Research Laboratory (now ICDDR,B) during Bangladesh’s war of Independence in 1971. Currently, he serves the Department of Medicine & Gerontology, Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center, USA. The views expressed herein are those of the author and are not those of the Embassy of Bangladesh in Washington DC.

Concert for Bangladesh: George Harrison and friends (1971)
As a junior American diplomat on my second overseas posting I had no idea that during this assignment I would witness momentous history-changing events. One nation crumbled following a paroxysm of violence. A new nation emerged, challenged but vibrant, intent on achieving its dreams. Forty years have passed, a time for personal reflection and remembrance of those times, when a chain of developments led to tragedy, but the ultimate triumphant emergence of Bangladesh.

**Pakistan, West to East**

Following a two-year assignment in Rangoon, my first as a new American Foreign Service Officer, in April 1969 I was assigned to Pakistan, specifically as a political officer at the American Consulate General in Dhaka, the capital of the province of East Pakistan. Following home leave and some area studies in Washington D.C., in the early summer my wife, year-old daughter, and I headed off to Pakistan. After consultations in West Pakistan at the Embassy in Islamabad and at U.S. consulates in Karachi and Lahore, and some sightseeing, we finally were off to our destination, Dhaka.

**East Pakistan - Initial Impressions**

Peering from the window as our PIA Boeing descended on the approach to Dhaka the landscape below appeared almost shockingly emerald green, in contrast to the gray, tan, brown and dull red hues of West Pakistan. As we were to learn, not only the land, but the people, their culture, language and lifestyles, also differed greatly from those of the “West Wing” of the country. In contrast to our Burma experience, signs of overpopulation and crowding were everywhere. After some time in temporary quarters we moved to a smaller but more livable single-story house on Road 32 in Dhanmondi, notable for being the street where a major political figure, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, head of the Awami League political party, lived.

**Getting to know East Pakistan – the land and people**

The American Consulate General was housed in the upper floors of Adamjee Court, one of the oldest high-rise office buildings in downtown Dhaka, near the National Stadium. The Principal Officer of the Consulate General for the initial part of my assignment was Consul General (CG) Leslie Squires, a distinguished officer who spent most of his career as a U.S. Information Service (USIS) officer. He was ably assisted by his Deputy Principal Officer, Andrew I.
“Andy” Killgore, a Middle East expert. Andy was the senior political officer, and my immediate boss in my capacity as the junior political officer. Other agencies represented as part of the post included USIS, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Department of Agriculture. The U.S. also had personnel with the Pakistan-SEATO Cholera Laboratory, many of whom were medical doctors from the U.S. Public Health Service, working on cholera prevention and treatment.

For a first-time political officer Dhaka was the ideal assignment, as the country and especially East Pakistan, was gathering steam for an intense and increasingly frenetic period of political activity.

By the time we arrived in Dhaka in the summer of 1969 long-time military dictator Ayub Khan had fallen from power and had been replaced by General Yahya Khan as President and Chief Martial Law Administrator. A groundswell for elections was putting pressure on the central government, and a variety of parties were gearing up for possible elections. Colleagues helped introduce me via a hectic round of introductory calls and meetings to a fascinating variety of East Pakistani personalities I needed to know. Outside office hours we joined a very active social scene, expanding our circle of professional acquaintances and making many new friends at dinner parties and cultural events. In our previous assignment in Burma most of our socializing was within the diplomatic community, but in Dhaka we were able to mingle freely with people from many walks of life, and were welcomed into many Pakistani homes.

Soon we realized what made East Pakistan so distinctive was not just its beautiful land and waterways, but especially its people. We developed a particular fondness for Bengalis, their friendliness, approachability and openness, and their rich culture. As an American diplomat and political officer I was delighted to be able to meet both officially and socially with political activists and others across a broad spectrum. Individuals representing political parties or groups seen to be anti-American still met with me willingly and attended social functions at our residence.

The human dimension of U.S. Engagement

A major focus of U.S. official and private involvement in East Pakistan was in the humanitarian/economic development arena, and a number of U.S. and international voluntary agencies (VOLAGS), now generally referred to as non-government agencies or NGOs, were active in the province. Some observers, noting the problems facing East Pakistan with its high population, meager natural resource base, and frequent floods and storms, termed the province “The Mount Everest of Development Economics.”

The U.S. had a sizeable USAID contingent working tirelessly to help improve the health, welfare and livelihoods of the people of East Pakistan. These dedicated, highly skilled and enthusiastic AID personnel were notable for their vigorous efforts to make a difference in the lives of the people of East Pakistan. Similarly our USIS staff fostered increased people-to-people contacts between East Pakistanis and Americans, through activities such as cultural exchanges and the International Visitor Program whereby notable East Pakistanis, especially young people who were likely potential leaders in their fields, had opportunities to visit the United States to meet counterparts and promote better mutual understanding of each other’s countries. USIS also ran programs in rural areas of the
province, showing films about the U.S. as a free world country with a long democratic history.

Politicking in earnest

With the removal of restrictions on political parties on January 1, 1970, and democratic elections promised in October, political parties geared up for elections. Although a number of parties were competing, it soon became apparent that the Awami League led by the charismatic Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the most popular, had the strongest grass-roots support, and the best organization. Politics dominated everything, it seemed. For a diplomat, especially for a political officer, this was an exciting time. Political rallies and processions proliferated, and political party posters competed for space on walls and utility poles.

In March, Archer K. Blood, a polished senior diplomat who had served previously in Dacca, arrived as the new Consul General. Local pundits took note of the names Blood, Butcher and Killgore, and one anti-American publication translated our names into Bengali to cast the Consulate in negative light. Later that summer Andy Killgore ended his assignment, and was replaced as Deputy Principal Officer by Robert “Bob” Carle, who had served earlier at the U.S. Consulate in Peshawar. Meanwhile, on the political front, unusually heavy flooding in August led to postponement of the elections from October 5 to December 7, but despite the postponement, electioneering continued to accelerate.

Natural disaster changes the equation

Roughly the size of the U.S. state of Wisconsin, East Pakistan, due its low-lying riverine and river delta topography, was subject to annual flooding and especially vulnerable to cyclones coming up the Bay of Bengal. A calamitous cyclone struck East Pakistan in the vicinity of the island of Bhola on November 12, 1970, one of the deadliest if not the deadliest natural disasters of the 20th century. When initial reports of death and devastation reached Dacca many felt the toll was exaggerated, until photos of bodies stuck in trees 30 feet above ground appeared in the local newspapers. Soon it became evident this was a human tragedy of untold dimensions. The devastation and death toll was multiplied by the fact the storm made landfall at high tide, pushing a wall of water inland, sweeping away and drowning hundreds of thousands, including many migrant workers who had moved into the area to help with the harvest. Merchant ships reported seeing bodies 60 miles offshore. Paddy land, homes, and fresh water sources were inundated by seawater.

The United States and many other concerned nations sprang into action to help relieve the misery and suffering of the survivors. U.S. doctors and medical personnel from the Cholera Lab rushed to the area to assess medical needs and threats of epidemics. The Dacca airport was choked with foreign aircraft hauling in relief supplies, including a brand-new U.S. Boeing 747 still in factory markings. Huge C-141 Starlifter cargo jets brought in Huey helicopters from the U.S., and U.S. crewman arrived from South Vietnam to fly them in the humanitarian assistance efforts.

The relief operation continued for several intense weeks, followed by reconstruction assistance in the affected area. Although there were worries elections for the National Assembly and provincial assemblies might be postponed further, the government and the Election Commission decided to proceed with the elections except in several districts directly affected by the cyclone disaster.
But a new factor emerged in the equation: the wide perception that the central government had dropped the ball in relief efforts, reacted slowly and performed sluggishly, especially in comparison with the dramatic foreign assistance that poured into the province.

By the time of the December 7 elections the Awami League symbol, the boat, seemed to be everywhere, and the election results were a tidal surge of support for the charismatic Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his party, whose call for greater provincial autonomy resonated with East Pakistan’s voters. To the years of perceived neglect of East Pakistan by the West Pakistan-dominated central government, the government’s inadequate response to the cyclone disaster was the last straw. By their vote public resentment and dissatisfaction over being treated as “second class” citizens took concrete form, showing popular support for a greater local voice in governance and distribution of resources. When all the elections were completed, including the delayed voting in the cyclone-affected districts, the Awami League had won a resounding victory, winning 160 of the 162 seats allotted to East Pakistan in the 300 seat National Assembly, and 288 of the 300 seats in the East Pakistan Provincial Assembly.

Consul General Blood commented in a report to Washington that this action may well have been a tipping point from what had been a movement for provincial autonomy to broad sentiment in favor of an independent Bangladesh.

Apparent opening the way to truly representative democracy

Foreign observers and Pakistanis alike lauded the elections as free and fair, probably the best-conducted in Pakistan’s history. For all Pakistanis the elections seemed to point in the direction of truly representative democracy. For East Pakistanis in particular the results were exciting, as their concerns would be reflected on the national scene. Not only had the Awami League virtually swept the elections, but because President Yahya and the Election Commission had decided (in November, 1969) to allocate National Assembly seats on the basis of population, one-person, one-vote, East Pakistan as the most populous wing of the country had the majority of NA seats and the Awami League as majority party country-wide appeared destined to form the national government with Mujib as Prime Minister.

With the advent of 1971, and the projected seating of the National Assembly (NA) on March 3, everything seemed to pointing to a new democratic era. Although challenges lay ahead in drafting a new constitution and finalizing other details our contacts with Awami League officials indicated they were confident their sweeping electoral victory would provide leverage to assure their basic objectives were achieved.

Dreams interrupted

Unfortunately, as weeks passed and negotiations dragged on between Awami League leaders and Pakistan People’s Party head Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (the PPP had won 81 seats) and other West Pakistani figures, including President Yahya, the atmosphere began to deteriorate. Bhutto felt he and his party should be able to share in power. Unfortunately, the scope of the Awami League victory, winning an absolute national majority of NA seats contested, seemed to have caught all key actors off-guard. On one hand, West Pakistani-based power brokers felt threatened – they had expected the AL to win a majority but not 160 seats. On the other hand some AL elements took a hard line against any concessions from the AL’s 6-Point Platform for autonomy. Bhutto threatened to boycott the NA if his...
demands were not accommodated.

On March 1, President/Chief Martial Law Administrator Yahya Khan, giving into pressure from Bhutto and other West Pakistani vested interests, announced indefinite suspension of seating of the National Assembly. In a spontaneous reaction, East Pakistanis took to the streets to protest what appeared to be a blatant denial of their electoral victory. Consul General Blood commented in a report to Washington that this action may well have been a tipping point from what had been a movement for provincial autonomy to broad sentiment in favor of an independent Bangladesh.

After weeks of civil disobedience involving widespread hartals (general strikes, with shops closed and transportation halted), non-cooperation with the government, attempts to block military movements and transport of military supplies, Bhutto and Yahya travelled to Dhaka for what all of us hoped would be a negotiated end to the impasse. Some days it appeared progress was being made, on other days it appeared positions were hardening. We at the Consulate-General still hoped for the best, although tensions clearly were rising.

**The die is cast, and the long nightmare begins**

On the evening of March 25, 1971, my wife and I were at home, when late that evening, about 11:00 p.m. or so, I received an urgent telephone call from Sydney Schanberg of the New York Times at the Intercontinental Hotel. He said there were reports talks had broken down, Yahya and Bhutto had left for the airport, Pakistani troops were tearing down the Bangladesh flags around the hotel, and he and his fellow journalists had been threatened they would be shot if they stepped outside the hotel.

After getting off the phone I immediately telephoned my boss, Bob Carle, who was attending a dinner at the Blood residence, to relay this information. Bob said they had received similar reports, and the situation was clearly getting bad, and a person with a stab wound had been brought to their house. They had heard some isolated gunshots, possibly from anxious local police. I too heard some sporadic gunfire. Then about midnight there was a commotion at the intersection near our house. I went out and checked and saw some Awami League volunteers, local residents and police, building barricades with metal trash cans, bricks, cement blocks, etc., to attempt to block any military moves against Sheikh Mujib’s residence down the street.

It was getting late, we were tired, and so my wife and I went to bed. At about 1:26 a.m. the morning of March 26 were awakened by the crash of automatic weapons fire right outside our bedroom window, only 20 feet or so away from the street.

I instinctively dove off the bed onto our carpeted floor, and suggested that my wife, sitting up in bed and startled by what was happening, join me on the floor. After we crawled into an interior room less
exposed to heavy weapons fire, I went to the phone to try to call the Consul General or whoever else I could reach. Although initially there was a tone on the line, it went completely dead before I could phone out. I then went up onto our roof where I could hear lots of gunfire and explosions, and see major fires burning in various directions. This continued the rest of the night, and towards daybreak we began to hear rhythmic gunfire, which sounded to us like possible executions, and which we later learned was the case.

When I tried to leave the house in the morning, and started to open our gate to the street, a Pakistani Army soldier pointed his weapon at me and waved me back inside, where I remained, frustrated, for the next 24 hours. During that time we listened to Yahya’s national broadcast defending his actions in ordering the brutal military crackdown. From our rooftop I could see that the Pakistani flag had replaced the Bangladesh flag that had flown above Sheikh Mujib’s house.

The next day, on the morning of March 27, the curfew was lifted, and an official car picked me up and took me to the Consulate, where we all were able to gather and compare notes on what we had observed and assess the situation. None of the post’s personnel had been injured, although a couple of homes had been slightly damaged by crossfire. Many had observed the severe damage and destruction around the city, fires still burning in some localities, seen bodies in numerous locations, and noted how terrified people appeared in the face of the military onslaught. Shanties and slum areas had been torched.

Over that and ensuing days we received reports from American residents and other credible sources of the results of the crackdown. We learned of killings of students and professors at Dhaka University, including one gentle Hindu professor who had a wide circle of friends in the U.S. who hosted him for frequent visits there.

The officers at the Consulate felt it essential that we get out and around and see for ourselves what was happening. On one occasion Eric Griffel, USAID’s East Pakistan head, reported he had seen countless bodies stacked up in a local park. Several of us visited a village outside Dhaka, passing bloated bodies in a field, and saw many injured people with festering slash wounds in a makeshift hospital – it was unclear who they were – Hindus, Muslims, Bengalis, Biharis – but they were victims of the blood-letting the military had unleashed.

Soon it became clear that the Army, which had acted with generally commendable restraint despite provocations such as being spat upon during the weeks of civil disobedience, once unleashed had acted with pent-up vengeance against a mostly unarmed populace. Hindus and others whose loyalty was suspect were special targets of military wrath, leading us in our reporting to use the term “selective genocide” regarding the military onslaught. The Army action sounded the death-knell for a united Pakistan, and set in motion a chain of events leading inexorably to the creation of an independent Bangladesh.

As Foreign Service professionals who placed a premium on clarity, accuracy and objectivity in our reporting and analysis, we sought to do our best to apprise our official readership in Washington and elsewhere of as much of the ground truths of the situation as we could obtain. We had a wide circle of contacts in Dhaka and elsewhere thanks to the activities of our personnel in USAID, USIS, and the Cholera Lab, in addition to the State Department Foreign Service Officers at the
post. Our locally-hired Pakistani personnel were invaluable in this regard. Family members, friends, and household staff added to our extensive network. And of course we were in close touch with diplomatic colleagues, especially those of allied countries like the UK, Australia and Japan with whom we exchanged information and assessments.

While I was at the office one day a friend of ours whose husband was a professor of political science at Dhaka University visited my wife. The friend prostrated herself at my wife’s feet, grabbed her ankles, and pleaded, “Please help us!” My wife, very upset by this, recounted the incident to me on my return home that evening. Other Americans experienced similar encounters with terror-stricken local friends and acquaintances.

The diplomats’ dilemma and “The Blood Telegram”

As reports of atrocities mounted, and the scope of this man-made disaster became clearer, we became unsure whether our reports were getting through or having any impact. We especially noted the questionable even-handedness of official pronouncements by Washington official spokesmen who expressed concern about developments and called on all parties to end the violence. This seemed inadequate when the violence in most part was being administered by an instrument of the Government of Pakistan – its Army – against unarmed elements of the East Pakistani population.

Meanwhile, as other diplomatic missions evacuated their citizens by their countries aircraft, our request for U.S. military aircraft to evacuate ours was turned down by the Pakistani Government, and the U.S. Government agreed to use PIA aircraft to transport American citizens wishing to leave the province.

Shortly after our dependents and non-essential mission personnel were evacuated a number of remaining officers of the Consulate, frustrated by the lack of responsiveness from Washington to our reporting and assessments, and the seeming unwillingness of our government to take a stand against the excessive use of force by the Pakistan’s military against its citizens in the East, decided we needed to do something to get our views across. Consequently, we decided to send a confidential cable dissenting from the apparent U.S. policy of inaction and silence over the unfolding tragedy. I offered to draft the message incorporating these consensus views, and a number of colleagues joined in signing it. Then, with some trepidation I took the typed telegram to Consul General Blood’s office, hoping he would approve sending it out via the official classified telegram channel. A while later his secretary informed me that he not only had approved sending the cable, but had added his own comment at the end, requiring her to retype the last two pages. She gave me a copy of the final version with the retyped pages, and I was surprised and heartened by what he had added, in essence associating himself with our views and concerns. By so doing this message came to be known rightly as “The Blood Telegram.” We all saw him as a rising star in the Foreign Service, and his decision to lay his career on the line by this action was indeed courageous.

In his addendum, Arch Blood predicted

“...the most likely eventual outcome of the struggle underway in East Pakistan is a Bengali Victory and the consequent establishment of an independent Bangla Desh. At the moment we possess the good will of the Awami League. We would be foolish to forfeit this asset by pursuing a rigid policy of one-sided support to the likely loser.”

When our April 6 message reached the State Department a
Foreign Service classmate, realizing it would cause a stir, added a “LIMDIS” (i.e., “Limited Distribution”) designator to it to reduce the possibility it might be “leaked.” It indeed did cause a stir (which we hoped it would) and also was leaked (which was not foreseen by us, as we intended it to be only for internal attention). Later we were pleased to learn that after seeing our cable a number of State Department colleagues specializing in South Asian affairs had promptly signed a joint memorandum to Secretary of State Rogers endorsing our concerns.

The view from Washington

A few weeks later I departed Dhaka to take up my previously assigned posting as Pakistan Desk Officer at the State Department, traveling via consultations with our Embassies in Islamabad and New Delhi. After home leave I began my new duties in the early summer of 1971, dealing with worsening crisis in East Pakistan as millions of refugees fled to neighboring areas of India. In my new role I met a number of Bengali diplomats at the Pakistan Embassy, all very impressive individuals who in a matter of weeks later defected to the Bangladesh cause. By then the U.S. Congress was receiving many letters from constituents alarmed by developments in East Pakistan, a number of which were generated by American evacuees from the conflict zone. These were forwarded to the State Department for response, and I found myself drafting replies the Senators and Representatives could convey back to the senders.

The following months were extraordinarily hectic, and I soon learned that even fairly junior desk officers have an important role in initiating briefing papers and other memoranda for use by more senior levels. Long workdays involved countless meetings, as well as frequent interaction with congressional staffs, especially those of Senator Edward Kennedy, who headed a Senate committee on refugee matters.

From tragedy to triumph

We followed developments closely, as the dying and refugee flow continued unabated, the Pakistan military became increasingly bogged down in the East, and tensions rose between India and Pakistan. The 10 million or so Bengali refugees created economic and political burdens for India; foreign humanitarian assistance to India did not cover the economic and social costs of dealing with such an influx, and the refugees’ tales of atrocities inflamed public opinion in West Bengal. Cross-border raids and clashes evolved into open hostilities in early December, and in a matter of days Indian forces and Mukti Bahini insurgents combined to overwhelm the Pakistani military in the East, whose commander, Gen Niazi, surrendered on December 16, 1971. The oppression ended. Bangladesh was liberated.

Postscript

For several months the U.S. delayed extending recognition to the new nation of Bangladesh. In the interim we continued to have an office in Dhaka, but without formal official ties. Fortunately, many Americans in the private sector, with charitable, religious and development assistance organizations, helped maintain excellent people-to-people contacts and demonstrate American generosity, goodwill and compassion.

Finally, the U.S. extended formal recognition of Bangladesh on April 4, 1972. I had the personal pleasure of writing the basic draft of the formal recognition statement signed by President Nixon.
me, that completed a full circle, and I became the State Department’s first Bangladesh Desk Officer. Formal diplomatic relations were established on May 18, 1972, when the Consulate General in Dhaka became the American Embassy.

Over time it became clearer why the U.S. government had been so muted in its reaction to the Pakistani Army’s crackdown: Pakistan was playing a key role in facilitating the U.S. opening to Mainland China. The summer of 1971 saw the dramatic announcement that National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger had made a secret visit to Beijing via Islamabad, laying the groundwork for a future visit to China by President Nixon. This was in the midst of the Cold War, and the U.S. was tied down in a seemingly endless and bloody conflict in Vietnam. Opening relations with China was of strategic importance, and Pakistan had helped that process. Developments in East Pakistan evidently had been subordinated to what was seen as a higher priority in the context of the Cold War nuclear “balance of terror” and the desire to extricate the U.S. from the Vietnam quagmire. The Indo-Pakistan War of 1971 also coincided with the PRC’s “coming out party” in its new role as one of the five permanent members of the United Nations. Furthermore, in the Cold War circumstances the United States was not keen about seeing a treaty ally such as Pakistan “dismembered,” which also influenced the U.S. position toward the crisis.

Had we been aware, even in general terms that “sensitive diplomatic initiatives” inhibited the U.S. ability to speak out forcefully against the brutality of the military crackdown, we still would have dissented from that position, although we might have changed some of the wording of our message.

Despite our worries about the impact on our careers, the 20 members of the Consulate staff who signed The Blood Telegram generally were not penalized, although some of the more senior signatories may have been affected in some manner. In most instances I personally found our colleagues in the State Department and overseas posts very supportive of our actions, given the circumstances we faced.

This was not the case for Consul General Blood. Arch’s courageous decision to associate himself with our dissent message derailed his career. His Dhaka assignment was curtailed, and he was reassigned to the Personnel Bureau at the State Department. He did gain recognition from his peers, receiving the top award given by the American Foreign Service Association, the coveted Christian Herter Award for creative dissent. But despite his qualifications he never became an Ambassador, although before retiring he held the prestigious position of Deputy Chief of Mission and Charge d’affaires at the American Embassy in New Delhi. He may not have achieved ambassadorial status, but he was honored by colleagues, who showered him with their respect. And for those of us who served with him those fateful days in Dhaka, he indeed was a hero. If he were with us now, I would be honored to join him in saying “Joi Bangla!”

Scott Butcher is a retired U.S. Senior Foreign Service Officer who served as Political Officer at the American Consulate General in Dhaka (then Dacca) from 1969-71. The views herein are those of the author and do not represent those of the U.S. Department of State or U.S. Government, nor of the Embassy or Government of Bangladesh.

Finally, the U.S. extended formal recognition of Bangladesh on April 4, 1972. I had the personal pleasure of writing the basic draft of the formal recognition statement signed by President Nixon.
For most theatre workers in Bangladesh, theatre is a part of life. They find a meaning of life in theatre, which is their vehicle for artistic expression of the contemporary issues they confront in real life. Our mainstream theatre, termed ‘group theatre’, is a non-profit theatre comprising over 250 repertory companies run by dedicated men and women. For socio-economic reasons they cannot become theatre professionals in the strictest sense, but what they produce is of absolutely professional standard, done with a professional zeal. Theatre workers are engaged in different professions for their living and dedicate their leisure time to theatre. That is how theatre in Bangladesh is not only surviving, but blooming with a passion.

The new theatre movement of Bangladesh is as old as the country itself. Although relatively a young nation, born in 1971 out of a bloody but glorious war of independence which claimed the sacrifice of three million people, the history of its theatre dates back to the 6th century AD, when a Buddhist play was performed in Sanskrit. About four centuries later, Sanskrit gave way as court language to Bengali, the mother tongue of the people living in this part of the world.

Theatre researchers have identified over seventy genres of indigenous theatre that still exist in Bangladesh today. Of these, nearly fifty are rooted in the various religious beliefs and faiths of the people; the rest are absolutely secular in nature. Of these, Jatra, featuring folk-plays of the operetta kind, is most popular.

Over the years most of the forms of indigenous theatre have decayed and some are at the point of extinction. Modern Bengali proscenium-stage theatre was the direct result of the influence of European theatre, when the English expatriates set up a playhouse for English plays in Kolkata in 1753.

Bengal society then was in a transition, moving from traditional feudalism to a modern society
influenced by colonial domination. There was a fusion of ideas that drew both from the ethos of the land and from Europe. Over the years, especially since the early 1940s, theatre became a very popular form, celebrating the struggles and the passions of the Bengali middle class. This has brought theatre out from the recreation halls of the feudal lords to the consumption level of the man in the street. The audience is more mixed - ‘groundling’ rather than ‘Dress Circle’.

With the creation of Bangladesh, theatre became a much more vital art form. The country saw a creative upsurge in its entire cultural arena, embracing literature, painting and in particular theatre arts, which has become on the one hand a fashionable pastime for aspiring performers and good serious entertainment for the educated urban class on the other. While this is true for the mainstream productions of the major groups, there are interesting innovations that draw heavily on folk theatre traditions. There are also semi-theatrical innovations that have swept the streets of Dhaka and elsewhere during political upheavals and moments of national crisis.

What has happened can best be described as a growing linkage, penetrating deeper into a wider social milieu. It reflects the shifts in social trends, in political culture and above all in the reorientation of social bonds. The theatrical content has also come to incorporate these realities. Prominent among these initially were so-called leftist issues in the socialist sense - issues of class, exploitation, protest, alienation born of social inequality. Subsequently, the new left agenda - gender issues, environment, globalisation - has entered the scene. With time, resistance against fundamentalism has also become part of this inclusive trend. This has had a telling effect on the spectators. There is greater identification with the new theatre - the experience, the ethos, the action. At the same time, with the growing interest in ethnicity and heritage, theatre activists are trying to rediscover tradition in newer forms.

Bangladesh theatre experiences a severe crisis of performance space. With the increase in the number of new groups, the activities of the established groups had to be curtailed because of the non-availability of theatre houses. It might sound unbelievable that in a country where there are over 250 non-profit theatre groups, and theatre being the most vibrant art form, there is only one purpose-built theatre.

The National Theatre, built under the initiative of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh at the premises of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (National academy for fine and performing arts), has got 3 stages. The main stage has got the state of the art facilities with an audience capacity of 750. The Experimental Theatre has a flexible stage which could be converted into an arena stage with an audience capacity of 350. The third one is a studio theatre which was originally designed as a rehearsal space. This small space accommodating about 150 audiences has become popular with the groups who want to stage experimental productions. But because there are about 80 groups willing to perform in these 3 stages every month, the authorities have to restrict the performances to mostly two for each group through these 3 stages in any given month. There are groups who wait for 3 months to get a performance date in one of these halls.

Another major problem Bangladesh theatre groups face is the lack of enough established playwrights. In such a situation, we lost three of our leading playwrights.

A scene from Muktodhara staged by Theatre (Photo: Mumit M, the Daily Star, June 03, 2011)
Abdullah Al Mamun, Selim Al Deen and S.M. Solaiman in recent years. Among our living playwrights, Syed Shamsul Haq, Mamunur Rashid, Mannan Heera, Moloy Bhowmick and Masum Reza are most productive now. However, over the last decade, some young playwrights like Samina Lutfa Nitra, Saymon Zakaria, Aminur Rahman Mukul, Abdullah Hel Mahmud and Aloke Basu have made their marks and have shown potentialities.

Side by side with original Bengali plays by contemporary playwrights, the groups produce classics, adaptation or translation of foreign plays and adaptation of Bengali novels or short stories. Among the foreign playwrights, the most popular are Shakespeare, Moliere and Brecht. Almost all the major plays of these three playwrights have been adapted or translated on our stage. Producing Brecht in seventies or eighties was a craze in Bangladesh and his plays appeared to be our contemporaries. But these days, like other countries of the world, Bangladesh theatre shows no interest in Brecht.

Among other foreign playwrights translated or adapted and produced on our stage are Ibsen, Chekhov, Sartre, Shaw, Beckett, Albee, Galsworthy, Gogol, Gorky, O’Neill, Molnar, Soyinka, Blessing and of course, Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus. Indian plays of non-Bengali origin by Girish Karnard, Vijay Tendulkar and Bhisam Sahni were also adapted and successfully staged besides production of many Bengali plays by Indian playwrights.

The 150th birth anniversary of the greatest icon of Bengali literature and culture, Rabindranath Tagore is now being celebrated all over the world. There are probably very few figures in the world who have shown such remarkable versatility. He was a poet, philosopher, novelist, story teller, social reformer, lyricist, composer, painter, actor and a great playwright. In playwriting he was probably ahead of his time and now considered the most significant playwright in Bengali literature. In Bangladesh, to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary, sixteen new productions based on Tagore’s works were launched. All the major Tagore plays were already staged by different groups over the last forty years or so.

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The liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971, served as a treasury of never-ending wealth for our playwrights. The themes of many plays were based on the history as well as the impact of the liberation war. Again the sense of resistance was portrayed in plays which dealt with the subjects of fundamentalism, communalism and social injustice. Theatre is a strong weapon to fight against all these odds in our society. It is indeed a matter of pride that our theatre makers are socially committed and use their creativity for creating a society free from all injustice and oppression.

We witness different kinds of plays on our stage though social satires are most popular. The audience wants to hear the truth and right criticisms of the society on the stage. That Bangladesh theatre has always been faithful to the aspirations of the people, it has gained immense popularity among the audience. Reinterpretation of myths has also attracted many playwrights. The traditional narrative theatre has also been adapted as a style by some of our playwrights, Selim Al Deen being the pioneer in this field. During the last few years, there was a trend to rediscover tradition by way of writing plays, using folk stories. This is a welcome change from the over-dominance of social satire, and this
intelligent mingling of tradition with innovation has opened up a new vista in our contemporary theatre.

In spite of the scarcity of playwrights, we find blossoms on our stage as far as productions are concerned. The creative minds of the directors and designers have conquered the limitations of performance space or facilities and showed us brilliant examples of memorable productions. This has resulted in establishing stage theatre as a serious medium of entertainment in Bangladesh. Our theatre groups have created an audience for their plays and that is the biggest achievement of the new theatre movement of Bangladesh started with the birth of the new country.

The leading theatre groups which have spearheaded the new movement are Nagorik, Dhaka Theatre, Theatre, Aronyak, Dhaka Padatik, Padatik, Natya Chakra, Prachyanat, Shubochoh, Prangone Mor, Palakar, Tirjak, Shabdboli, Anushilon, Manipuri Theatre, Bogra Theatre, Desh Natok, Nagorik Nattgangon, Arindom, Theatre Art Unit etc. At any given time each of these groups has got a repertory of more than one play.

In Bangladesh four public universities - Dhaka, Jahangirnagar, Chittagong and Rajshahi - have got theatre departments. These offer graduate and post graduate courses in theatre. There are part time private theatre schools like Abdullah Al Mamun Theatre School, Prachyanat School of Acting & Design and Nagorik Natyangon School. They offer, both theoretical and practical basic lessons which help the aspirant young actors to prepare themselves for their career. It is true that the graduates and post graduates in theatre arts, hardly find a suitable full time job connected with theatre. Stage can’t offer them any money but some have found jobs in TV channels. Prominent actors, however, can make a living from acting in TV serials.

Theatre Festivals are often organised by national organisations like Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation (federating body of all theatre groups), Bangladesh Centre of the International Theatre Institute, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy and also by individual groups as a part of their anniversary celebrations. Though the festivals have got no fixed dates, the ones organised by International Theatre Institute are of international nature while groups from India often participate in the festivals organised by different groups. These festivals add colours to the theatre scene and help to spread the audience base.

Street theatre as a genre has become quite popular both with the theatre workers and the audience. During winter season, open air theatre performances are regularly held. Street theatre as a genre has become quite popular both with the theatre workers and the audience. During winter season, open air theatre performances are regularly held.

Quarterly Theatre happens to be the oldest theatre magazine of the country now in the 40th year of its regular publication. Some other theatre magazines were launched but could not continue because of financial constraints. Theatrewala, another quarterly is being published for the last 10 years or so. Plays are published in book form by some publishers but not many publishers show interest in bringing out plays.

In spite of the lack of many limitations, Bangladesh theatre groups are continuing their struggle not only for survival but also for creative excellence. For Bangladesh Theatre activists it is a theatre of love, theatre of passion and theatre of commitment.

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A great awakening dawned over Bengal during the first decade of the nineteenth-century. Bengal was one of the most prosperous, culturally dynamic, diverse, steeped in traditions and, not coincidentally, rebellious provinces in the Mughal Empire. This awakening was not a “backwash” of the tsunami-like tidal wave of modernity sweeping North America, England and across the northern shore of the Mediterranean. It ignited as by spontaneous combustion in a period of chaotic social, economic upheaval, aftermath of the collapse of an old world foreign imperial regime and supersession of another foreign power as defacto sarkar of Bengal. The Bengal Renaissance burst forth out of simmering public discourse on the state of society along the margins of a deeply polarized Bengal society.

On to the stage stepped Rammohan Ray. Born in Radhanagar, a small town in the mufassil (country side), into a Vaisnab, high caste Brahman paternal household which had lost caste when his great grandfather became a zamindar under Nawab Murshid Quli Khan. The family maintained a religious life-style under the influence of his mother, Tarini Devi, a strict Sakta, who engaged a scholarly Tantric swami as his tutor. Ramkanta, his father, sought to pass on the zamindari mantle to his precocious son and oversaw his instruction in Persian, the language of commerce and governance, while his mother pushed the vocation of a pandit, and provided his instruction in Sanskrit. Rammohan fulfilled both parental aspirations.

Rammohan’s early formation within an often turbulent household was nurtured in the Din-i-Ilahi syncretistic Hindu-Muslim culture of late Mughal upcountry Bengal. Bengal society was a kaleidoscope...
of sectarian and cultural diversity—Sunnı, Shi’ah, Sufi, Vaisnab, Saiva, Sakta, Tantrika, Bhakta, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, Bene Israel, Protestant, Catholic Christian—in full spate of extraordinarily vibrant, rich intellectual, religious, political, literary and artistic ferment. There was inevitable rivalry between maulvis and pandits, putative guardians of the dominant traditions.

This was Rammohan’s world. Later, his travels throughout Bengal in the service of the Honorable John Company, as the East India Company was commonly called, deepened and broadened his discontent, and hardened his resolve.

Rammohan Ray’s first position in the EI Company was diwan to the Collector of Dacca-Jalalpur, modern Faridpur. He moved to Murshidabad, the capital of the Mughal Bengal Province where he was the private munshi of the Registrar of the Appellate Court. His family connections in Mughal society were useful. Here he published, according to tradition, the Persian language Tohfatu ‘l-Muwahhidin, “Gift to Monotheists.” He threw down the gauntlet to all religious leadership, pandits as well as maulvis, charging them with misleading the people, attacking each other’s religions, and persecuting each other’s followers. The people do not know whom to trust, he wrote. Tohfat advocated belief only in “One Supreme Being, Who has created and sustains the whole universe”. Rammohan condemned religious leaders for fomenting religious intolerance. When his Company employer was promoted to Magistrate at Jessor Rammohan followed as his munshi, perhaps also skipping town to escape controversy. After brief service as diwan in Bhagalpur and sharistadar in Ramgarh, Rammohan’s last post in the EI Company was diwan to the Collecter in Rangpur from 1809 to 1815, with a break in the middle.

This first-hand experience in senior Bengali staff positions in both the revenue and judicial branches of the East India Company was the basis for his testimony before the House of Commons in 1832 during the hearings relating to the 1833 Charter renewal. Rammohan’s testimony influenced Parliament’s decision to cancel the Company’s monopoly in India, as his campaign against sati forced Governor General Bentinck’s promulgation of the Sati Act of 1829 outlawing immolation of widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands.

Rammohan did not act alone. He gathered around him other discontents, intellectuals, poets, sons and daughters of the bhadralok, of zamindari families, Muslim and Hindu, young East India Company factors, young pandits, and from the growing residential international business community. He formed the Atmiya Sabha in 1814 as a debating society whose only membership requirement was repudiation of any form of idol worship. Prominent in this group were the Tagores.

High caste Brahmans from Jesser, the Tagores rose to prominence as zamindars with land holdings throughout varendra Bengal—Faridpur, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Dinajpur—and for this reason, like Rammohan’s family, were ostracized by conservative Hindu society for breaking caste. Rammohan publicly challenged the authority of the Calcutta pandits on the grounds that few, if any, met the standard set by the ancient Hindu lawgiver, Manu, of great learning in the Sanskrit scriptures. Dwarkanath became Rammohan’s most trusted friend and a distant cousin, Prasanna Kumar Tagore became a leading member of the Atmiya Sabha and later of the Brahmo Samaj. The Tagore family story is intertwined with the narrative of the freedom struggle on the South Asian subcontinent from the nineteenth through the twentieth-centuries.

Rammohan’s rediscovery of the ancient Upanisads stoked a naturally fertile imagination. He immersed himself in the age-old discourse within Hindu sacred scriptures over the nature of the Supreme Being. The oldest Upanisads, he believed, affirmed the oneness of the Supreme Being.
This fundamental doctrine was confirmed by the Vedanta tradition of the great Sankaracarya, and by Islam and Christianity. Corollary to this doctrine was the precept that everyone, irrespective of social status, gender, station in life, who truly seeks to know the Supreme Spirit may receive the gratuitous divine gift of liberating knowledge and emancipation from separation from the One. This conviction of the freedom and responsibility of every individual to realize the highest purpose of human life was the root of his egalitarianism. The collective wisdom of the rishis, sages, prophets, wise men of the great world scriptural traditions established, Rammohan believed, the pragmatic universal truth that religious intolerance produces the cascading effect of superstition, exploitation, loss of human rights, civil unrest, anarchy. Religious intolerance saps the vital energy out of a people.

All Bengal was abuzz. As in Colonial America "revolution" was in the air. In 1823, Governor-General John Adam shut down the Calcutta press. There were as many newspapers in Calcutta as in Philadelphia, Boston and London. Rammohan led the public protest. His Appeal to the King in Council praised King George IV for his great gift to Bengal of the rule of law and reminded his Britannic Majesty of the essence of that law, freedom of speech. He lectured King George IV on inspiring lessons from the Mughal past. "Akbar was celebrated for his clemency, for his encouragement of learning, and granting civil and religious liberty to his subjects, and Aurangzebe, for cruelty and intolerance, yet the former reigned happy, extended the power and his dominions, and his memory is still adored..." Could His Britannic Majesty do less than Akbar? Rammohan sketched two scenarios for the King in Council and for his countrymen to ponder.

"Canada during the late war with America, afforded a memorable instance of the truth of this argument. The enlightened inhabitants of that colony, finding that their rights and privileges had been secured to them, their complaints listened to, and their grievances redressed by the British government, resisted every attempt of the United States to seduce them from their allegiance to it."

His people had a choice, to seek dominion status like Canada or follow the lead of the American revolutionaries, and a warning, "as a people become enlightened, they will discover that by a unity of effort, the many may easily shake off the yoke of the few, and thus become emancipated from the restraints of power altogether..." The Press Regulation was rescinded.

Rammohan Ray’s writings, and public campaigns gave voice to the frustrations of the young and restless across Bengal, and a ground swell of discontent took to the streets and salons of Calcutta. Rammohan also attracted the attention of the leading lights of reform in England and America, John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham, Robert Owen, the American Unitarians William Ellery Channing, Jared Spark, and British Unitarians, Harriet Martineau, W. J. Fox. Rammohan was adopted by the American and British liberals and he embraced them. Rammohan Ray encouraged, supported, joined in their causes but kept his distance. American and British reformers saw in Rammohan Ray’s ideas confirmation of the global relevance of their own. Rammohan Ray pressed to advantage the commonality of Bengali discontent with the unrest and revolutionary spirit of ordinary people in America, Britain, Spain and Portugal which confirmed the universality of his own views.

The dominating civil rights issue of early nineteenth-century Bengal was sahamaran (sati), the Hindu practice of widow immolation on her husband’s the funeral pyre. Rammohan’s sister-in-law “committed” sati. His early personal revulsion for the custom led him to the discovery that the Hindu texts did not sanction it and this fueled a relentless attack on the practice.

Rammohan published four tracts, and a petition for its abolition to the House of Commons, an appeal to Lady Hastings and an address to Lord Bentinck, all urging the immediate outlawing of sati. Sati in Bengal joined slavery in America as the great nineteenth-century crimes against humanity in the view of Rammohan Ray and Whig-abolitionists in England and America.
These publications were widely read in England and America. Lord Bentinck promulgated the Sati Act of 1829, making participation in a sati a criminal act of murder. Raja Rammohan went to England in 1831 to defeat the pro-sati petition to Parliament, and as a titled Mughal sardar on a mission to preserve the Mughal empire. The petition failed and Akbar II got his raise. Along with America, France, Ireland and Spain, Bengal had become one of the international hotspots of revolution.

Rammohan was fast changing the dynamics of Bengali culture from acquiescent to progressive. The Atmiya Sabha spawned other debating societies. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Bengali-Portuguese poet and lecturer at the newly founded Hindu College, gathered around him young Hindu College students impatient for change. They became known as “Young Bengal”. They talked of pride and loss in their Bengali heritage, of a sense of longing for return to the glory days of Bengal that Rammohan himself expressed in his commentaries and sati tracts. Derozio’s poem “To My Native Land” captured the mood.

“My country! In the days of glory past, A beautious halo circled round thy brow, and worshipped as a deity thou was!—Where is Thy glory, where the reverence now?”

Meanwhile, Rammohan’s campaigns against the dowry system and female infanticide, his advocacy of widow remarriage, support for missionaries’ schools and the founding of The Free school (Anglo-Hindu School), and the Vedanta College, tactical disassociation from the founding of the Hindu College so as not to be a liability, support of the Saugor Island Society and other economic development programs, founding the newspapers, Banga Dut, the Bangla version of his English language The Bengal Herald, Mir’atu ‘l Akbar, and Sambad Kaumudi insured that he was in the eye of the storm of every controversy of his generation.

Founded on the eve of his departure for England, the Brahmo Samaj was his valedictory campaign to preserve the unity of thought and action in the religious, social and political revolution he had begun in Bengal. Dwarkanatha son, Debendranath, took up the mantle of Rammohan’s reform by re-envigorating, some say re-inventing, the Brahmo Samaj after the Raja’s death in 1833. This was the inheritance of Bengal’s greatest poet, Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

One other issue reverberated throughout his writings, language, itself. A friend remembered “...a conversation with him in which he mentioned his endeavours at the first commencement of his literary career to become a poet, ‘but failing’ he said ‘to excel Bharut Caunder Roy...’, I turned my attention to prose writings....”

Rabindranath Tagore famously wrote, “languages are like jealous sovereigns and passports are rarely allowed for travelers to cross their strictly guarded boundaries.” Rammohan told readers that he tore the “dark curtain” of the Sanskrit language so that ordinary people could read the sacred scriptures. He chided pandit opponents for not using the Sanskrit language in religious discourse then reprimanded them for using sadhu bhas, literary speech, in public. Rammohan was proud of the vernacular asadhu bhas. Gaudiya Vyakaran, Bengali Grammar, was Rammohan’s effort to bring to his native language the order that he observed in the grammars composed by the Orientalists. Published in 1833, it is the first Bangla grammar composed by a Bengali. Freedom of speech, he believed, entails choice of language. Rammohan set the course for the modern nation of Bangladesh has arisen phoenix-like out of the ashes of a catastrophic and victorious war of independence from an oppressive colonial regime and has survived “fire, wind and storm” to be for the whole world an heroic example of the free spirit and brave heart of a people who are aparajita, unvanquished.
the development of Bangla into a modern language.

Rammohan Ray’s Bengali defenders have always gotten the better of his detractors. Rabindranath Tagore response to the absence of Raja Rammohan Ray from the pantheon of heroes of the Independence Movement was,

“The very magnitude of mind of such men becomes almost a grievance for smaller personalities, and Ram Mohan has been misunderstood by his own countrymen because he had in him the modern spirit of freedom and comprehensive grasp of truth. We must, however, never make the mistake that those great men who are belittled by their contemporary compatriots do not represent their countries, for countries are not always true to themselves.”

Surendranath (surrender not) Banerjea wrote, “a nation that does not know how to honour its heroes, does not deserve them and will not have them.”

The Tagores have kept Raja Rammohan Ray’s memory alive in Bengal. Maulvi Obaidullah El Obaide, Superintendent of the Dacca Government Madrassa, translated Tohfatu ‘l Muhwahhidin into English and published by the Adi Brahmo Samaj in 1884. Rammohan’s years settling disputes between tenant farmers and zamindars in Rangpur have not been forgotten by the people of this great city. On August 28, 2011, the bas relief mural of Rammohan by the Bangladeshi sculptor Aneek Reza was unveiled by Bangladesh Government Industry Minister Dilip Barua at the Raja Ram Mohan Club in Rangpur. It is an extraordinarily fitting tribute to the greatest nineteenth-century champion of public education in Bengal and the world that the very house in which Rammohan lived while in Rangpur is the site of a new school.

The guiding principle of the renaissance that Raja Rammohan Ray inaugurated, in Rabindranath Tagore’s words, “the modern spirit of freedom and comprehensive grasp of truth,” once again sparked a popular Bengali awakening that led to the founding of The People’s Republic of Bangladesh on March 26, 1971. The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman followed Raja Rammohan Ray’s American model of revolution against tyranny. Rammohan’s words have echoed down to our times as a warning to all governments,

“as a people become enlightened, they will discover that by a unity of effort, the many may easily shake off the yoke of the few, and thus become emancipated from the restraints of power altogether.”

The modern nation of Bangladesh has arisen phoenix-like out of the ashes of a catastrophic and victorious war of independence from an oppressive colonial regime and has survived “fire, wind and storm” to be for the whole world an heroic example of the free spirit and brave heart of a people who are aparajita, unvanquished.

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As Bangladesh celebrates forty years of its independence, there have been some wonderful achievements in regards to women’s rights. Yet there remain great challenges to women’s participation as equal partners with men at home, at work, and at school. As a result of Bangladesh’s independence, students are able to receive instruction in their mother tongue and literacy has increased substantially in forty years. However, in many communities, female literacy still lags behind. The female artists of Bangladesh contribute unique perspectives on the position of women and the myriad barriers to women’s liberation.

Bangladesh has a female prime minister as well as three female ministers in the cabinet, who are trying to revise laws and create programs that promote equality for men and women as guaranteed by the Constitution. The citizenship laws have been revised to allow women to give Bangladeshi citizenship to their children even if the father is not Bangladeshi. The One-Stop-Crisis Center program is being expanded for women surviving violence to provide all needed services in one place, including medical examination, counseling, legal assistance, and police assistance. Government needs to continue its support to ensure women’s equal access to education and personal freedom, especially in rural areas.

Art that addresses social issues can serve as a tool for discussion and reflection, and lead to awareness, healing, and change. Several women artists – within the country and abroad as part of the Bangladeshi diaspora -- are directly addressing the everyday
lives of women and questioning gender inequality. This short piece looks at the work of three Bangladeshi women artists whose work focuses on gender issues, Preema Nazia Andalib, Atiya Islam Anne, and the author of this article, Monica Jahan Bose.

Preema Nazia Andalib is an artist and curator whose performance, paintings and multi-media work critiques the traditional roles of women and the control of their bodies. Her performance, "Marry My Egg," shows the artist in her red wedding sari and gold jewelry, methodically using a knife and fork to cut and eat poached eggs, while the table is cluttered with egg shells. The performance raises questions about society’s focus on women merely as vessels and carriers of children rather than individuals with other needs and desires. Andaleeb is one of the few Bangladeshi artists with the courage to deal directly with the question of gender and women’s position in society.

Atiya Islam Anne’s paintings focus on the precarious position of women and draw attention to such practices as acid burning and...
the manner in which women considered mere objects. Her images are often unabashedly gory and have a surrealist quality reminiscent of Frida Kahlo. The act of painting these images seems to be an act of both anguish and empowerment. Many of her paintings feature high heeled shoes in an array of colors, an allusion to the way in which women must dress to please men. Some of her works also have art historical references, such as the Mona Lisa in one image juxtaposed with a veiled woman wearing high heels, all against a background of burning red. The artist appears to question society's continuing obsession with the “feminine mystique” and the need to change, control, or cover women's bodies.

As a Bangladeshi-American artist and activist, my own art looks at gender, power, language, and identity from a cross-cultural lens. The sari blouse is a recurring motif in my work, representing the female body and woman's place in society. I use Bengali script in my work as a political act, affirming multilingualism, universal literacy, and the mother language movement in Bangladesh resulting in independence. My “Eye Candy” series is about marriage, love, desire, and the objectification of women, the sari blouse and red boots becoming almost a self-portrait, showing my Eastern and Western sides. Like Anadaleeb and Islam, I am intrigued by society's obsession with marriage and the one-dimensional view of women as beautiful objects and mothers.

In the “Elections 4” painting, the red sari blouse against a green sari becomes a feminist flag of Bangladesh. My recent etchings continue this theme of female empowerment and freedom, with the red sari blouses flying away like birds.

I am interested in using my art to further the dialogue about gender, literacy, and empowerment. The role of the artist in society is changing, with many artists moving from a model of isolation to one of collaboration. For my next project, I will work with women from my ancestral village of Katakhali in the southern coast of Bangladesh to create a collaborative series of hand-made prints on red and white saris, representing the different stages of a woman's life – from young bride to mature woman. These sari art pieces will be worn by the women who made them and displayed in Dhaka and Washington DC to enhance cross-border dialogue about the transformations that are taking place in Bangladesh and globally.

The role of women in Bangladesh is shifting. Art addressing gender can play a key role in stimulating discussion that leads to transformation of society.

Monica Jahan Bose is an artist and activist living in Washington, DC. She studied art at Wesleyan University and Santiniketan and has a law degree from Columbia University. The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not reflect the position of the Embassy.
A nation requires a vision for its cherished development. The election manifesto of the present government ‘Vision-2021’ has been prepared with the dream of making a new Bangladesh at the outset of golden jubilee celebration of our great independence. A promise of fundamental transformation in all spheres including socio-economical and political arena has been reflected in this vision that also covers the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The present government has placed poverty alleviation and elimination of all sorts of inequity at the forefront of its development strategy. Strengthening of social safety nets, food autarky, faster agricultural growth, employment generation etc. are identified as some of the key challenges for attaining the goals. This article is focused on the initiatives taken by the present government during last three years for improvement of mass people especially on poverty alleviation, social safety nets, food security and agricultural sector.

**Poverty Alleviation**

Poverty eradication, the first condition for development, is the main challenge of the present government. Adam Smith in his book ‘Wealth of Nations’ noted, ‘No society can surely be flourishing and happy of which by far the greater part of the numbers are poor and miserable’. So, undertaking of long term effective programs is required. The government has taken a strategy for combating poverty reduction both in short and long terms. In the poverty reduction strategy framework of the revised National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction II (NSAPR II), special importance
has been given on creation of macroeconomic environment, identification of critical areas and essential infrastructure for pro-poor growth and social protection for the vulnerable section of the society and human resources development. During the last three years, the government had succeeded in groundbreaking for attaining the desired growth. In spite of internal and external obstacles, real GDP growth rate was 6.7 percent in FY 2010-11 which is the highest in last 40 years due to the higher growth in agriculture, manufacturing and service sector and the target for FY 2011-12 is 7.0 percent. In FY 2009-11, per capita income increased by 24 percent compared to 19 percent in the period FY 2002-04. Due to macroeconomic stability, domestic savings rate increased to 19.93 percent during the last three years against 18.77 percent in FY 2002-04. Export growth has increased to 47 percent during the last three years of the present government.

On the other hand, export growth rate was 27 percent in FY 2002-04. The rate of inward remittance was three times higher during the last three years of the present government compared to that of FY 2002-04. According to the primary report of ‘Household Income and Expenditure Survey-2010’, population living below the poverty line decreased to 31.5 percent in 2010 from 40.4 percent in 2005. During this period, poverty gap reduced significantly while income inequality ratio decreased moderately. The government has been increasing its revenue budget to eradicate poverty. Bangladesh has achieved significant progress in poverty reduction and targets of the MDGs. Achievement of the United Nations Award on reduction of child mortality rate is undoubtedly recognition of the success of the present government.

Bangladesh is also in the right track for attaining other MDG targets including eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, women empowerment etc. In order to make the growth poor friendly and sustainable, and reach its benefit to the majority of the lower tier of the population pyramid, the most important steps taken are making the financial services accessible to the underprivileged people including extreme poor, landless, small farmers, sharecroppers, small entrepreneurs and poor women.

Social Safety Nets

Since the government believes in long term development vision, it considers social safety net programs not only as a tool of poverty reduction but also as a crisis-fighting-instrument. Microfinance is one of the important determinants for empowering poor population so that they can survive poverty. Growth of employment and income generating agricultural and SME sectors is speeding up the poverty eradication process and playing an important role in achieving sustainable economic and social upliftment. The government is trying to empower the extreme poor by providing special grants and supports in the areas of education, health, service and training to generate self-employment through microcredit facilities and to ensure food security for hardcore poor by providing food free of cost or at fair price. During the last three years, the areas of social safety net programs and allocation for it have increased.

Social safety net programs include Old Age Allowance, Widow, Divorced and Distressed Women Allowance Scheme, Allowances for the Insolvent Disabled Programme, Education Scholarship for disabled students, increase in honorarium of insolvent freedom fighter etc. ‘One House One Farm’ is a successful initiative of the government in reducing poverty. This project has been implemented in 9,640 villages of 482 upazillas. Government’s housing loan scheme
(Grihayan Tahbil), Returning Home Programme, microcredit for the self-employment of the women, and the rehabilitation and alternative employment programme for the beggars have been implemented with a view to eradicating poverty.

Development of Agriculture Sector

Agriculture is the prime among the priority sectors of the government. The aim of the government is to achieve self-sufficiency in food by 2013. A number of steps have been initiated for the expansion of small irrigation facilities, removal of water logging, production of improved quality and high yielding varieties of seeds and their distribution and development and expansion of the varieties of crops suitable for the weather and environment of a particular region. The highest priority has been attached to increasing the production of domestic food grains. The supply of agriculture inputs at a reasonable price is being continued with providing of subsidies.

The prices of fertilizers have been reduced thrice to keep them within the reach of purchasing power of the farmers. Taka 48.92 billion was granted as agriculture subsidy in FY 2009-10 and the allocation for agriculture subsidy was Taka 57.0 billion and Taka 45.0 billion in FY 2010-11 and 2011-12 respectively. The successful decoding of genome sequencing of jute has unfolded a new vista for further invention of new high yielding species of jute, which are expected to be salinity-resistant and tolerant to drought, insects and diseases. Along with extensive credit facilities in the agriculture sector, Bangladesh Bank has brought qualitative changes in the process of credit flow specially by strengthening monitoring activities so that the farmers can avail hassle-free credit in time in a transparent way. Disbursement of agriculture credit in FY 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12 (upto September 2011) was Taka 115.12 billion, Taka 121.84 billion and Taka 20.52 billion respectively.

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The target for the current financial year is Taka 138.0 billion, which is the highest so far. A refinance scheme of Taka 5.0 billion has been launched to ensure the credit facilities for the landless sharecroppers who were otherwise deprived of institutional credit. Under this scheme, about Taka 3.1 billion was disbursed among 2,70,802 sharecroppers till date. To make the agriculture inputs available and agriculture credit disbursement easy among the farmers, 18.2 million agro-input assistance cards have been distributed across the country and savings accounts of more than 9.5 million farmers have been opened accepting Taka 10 only as an initial deposit. Steps have been taken to disburse credit at 4 percent concessional rate to encourage cultivation of different variety of pulses, oil seeds, spices specially ginger, turmeric, onion, chilly, cumin and maize. As a result, expenditure for importing food grains is gradually decreasing.

Food Security

Enormous success has been achieved in ensuring food security. The government has updated the ‘Food Security Policy’ with a view to ensuring food security for the hardcore poor and prepared ‘Bangladesh Food Security Investment Plan 2010’ in order to develop a sustainable food security
The three elements which are very important to ensure food security in the country are adequate supply of food, increasing the purchasing power of people for getting food and ensuring nutrition for all. There has been a record growth in food production due to favorable environment, extensive agriculture credit disbursement, agricultural equipments and other timely assistances of the government. During the last three years, annual food production has increased by 9.71 percent. The increase of wages and access of people to income-oriented activities have enhanced their purchasing power. In order to meet the food demand of the hardcore poor, the coverage of the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), and Gratuitous Relief (GR) programs have been widened. Steps are being taken to involve the hardcore poor in the development activities by providing them with temporary employment.

Initiatives are on the way for supplying food at fair price. Rationing system, Open Market Sale (OMS) of food grains and other distribution mechanisms have been introduced. Steps are being taken to make these arrangements more rationalized. Various steps have been taken to ensure food reserve. To build up stock, an initiative has been taken to procure food grains from overseas. It will help maintain farmers’ earnestness and success for high level production and at the same time, build up a safe food reserve through import.

It is possible to make Bangladesh a country free from poverty and hunger, if the country can be upgraded to a ‘middle income’ country by 2021 in line with the vision of the government. For this, all the initiatives taken for poverty eradication must be expedited in the coming days. Campaign for ‘financial inclusion’ should be accelerated with the participation of poor and disadvantaged people as an effective weapon for poverty eradication; adequate credit flows should be ensured for social security and other productive pursuits including agriculture, SMEs and environment friendly projects; effective measures should be taken so that people can cope with the climate change. There exists a worldwide acclamation for Bangladeshi people for survival combating all odds. Their creativity is endless. Both society and government should create an environment of confidence for further advancement of this nation. Let all of us strive to make this commitment meaningful.

Dr. Atiur Rahman is the Governor, Bangladesh Bank, the central Bank of Bangladesh. The views expressed in the article are those of the writer and do not reflect the position of the Embassy.
Beyond a doubt, Bangladesh has made great progress in achieving gender equality and enhancing the status of women. Its success in girls’ education, reducing fertility and mortality and the famed microcredit revolution are some of the gains that set it apart from its neighbors and other countries of its income level. When young women and their families were asked what this meant for them and how their lives were different from their mothers’, the unexpectedly common theme was “finding a voice” or “being able to speak” or “being listened to”.

—Whispers to Voices—Gender and Social Transformation in Bangladesh (World Bank Paper-2008).

Forty years ago when Bangladesh emerged from the ashes of a nine-month scourge of a brutal war of lethal proportion, the big question mark was not whether it can rebuild itself, but rather will it be a sustainable country. Losses in human lives, property, and infrastructure in a nine-month period were far greater than that brought about by a war of as many years in some other countries. Labeled as an international basket case at its birth, global pundits had given us a prognosis of an early demise as a sovereign country at worst or a terminal case of international dependency at best. We came to be known as the poster child of poverty, illiteracy, with indexes of economic and human development at the bottom of the international scale.

Our struggle in the first ten years of our existence was one for survival, bringing food to the table for our millions first, and then meeting other needs. It took a great amount of courage and optimism of a visionary to speak about the future prospects of a country in the crisis in the seventies, and for that matter much of the first half of the eighties. Our image abroad was that of a country waging an unending battle against poverty, mounting population, and natural scourges. We existed in the peripheral vision of the international community, appearing in full vision when natural disasters struck the country.

Yet, we have survived and survived well. We grew our economy from around $30 billion in GDP in 1971 to over $100 billion in 2010. We raised our rate of literacy to twice the original level from less than 25% to nearly 60% now; we halved the birth rate from over 3% to around 1.6%; and our absolute poverty index decreased from near fifty percent to less than 25 percent. We raised life expectancy
by adding nearly twenty years to average life by preventing diseases, decreasing infant mortality, improving overall health and sanitation, and spreading education. But these statistics alone do not tell the real story behind our success. The real story of our success is from our women and their silent contribution to our growth in human development.

At the time of our independence less than 20% of our women were literate. Less than half of our school age girls attended primary schools, and only one third attended secondary school. Of the total labor force women constituted less than a quarter, nearly three quarters of women stayed home. Majority of the women were married early, with a result that we had one of the highest birth rates in the world at the time of independence. In a country with very low access to health and sanitation our women suffered the most as they had to do all the domestic work, raise children, and were hit hard by unemployment and limited means to augment their family income. They were also caught between two vastly different worlds; one determined by culture and tradition that confines their activities inside family homesteads and the other shaped by increasing landlessness and poverty that forces them outside into wage employment for economic survival.

Forty years ago no one would have believed that women bound by an overwhelmingly male dominant conservative society, centuries of negative gender bias and other societal taboos against women could come out of that moribund order. It would have been difficult to make a prognosis that women of this nation would not only find a voice for themselves but also place their country several steps ahead of many other developing nations in joining the labor force, raising literacy, reducing birth rate and child mortality, and increasing overall health of our nation. Today, our women account for 40% of our total labor force (compared with 20% for Pakistan); they account for nearly 90% of workers in the garment industry. Between 1971 and 2004, Bangladesh halved its fertility rates. In much of the country today, girls’ secondary school attendance exceeds that of boys. The share of girls in total enrollment is now 52 percent in primary and 55 percent in secondary education, compared with fewer than 40 percent in the early 1990s. In college girls’ enrollment increased from around 11% in late 70s to over 50% now. The gender gap in infant mortality has been closed. The micro-credit revolution has boosted women’s solidarity groups and earning potential.

These are impressive statistics; a stellar performance for a country that was dismissed only three decades ago as another addition to international burden of limping economies with a huge population. Yet with all these achievement Bangladesh remains a paradox. The country has still a daunting level of poverty, huge gaps in literacy, and proclivity to natural disasters, and yet it has made gains over its neighbors in many areas that are enviable. What made these gains possible, and are these sustainable over time?

Clearly all these happened because our people, particularly our women wanted to take an active part in the development of their country, in the development of their future and their children. Our women had paid a great price for our liberation, in lives, property, and personal honor. More than anybody they wanted their voices to be heard, they wanted to be counted, and recognized. Circumstance forced them to come out of the confines of their homes, and take active part in formulating the welfare of their families. And gradually, circumstances also favored them.
Experts who have studied these gains in human development in Bangladesh in recent times, women in particular, have opined that three key dynamics helped women of Bangladesh to make their mark and help their country to succeed. These are government policies to reduce gender inequality, raise female literacy, and support formation of strong civil societies and non-government organizations. Other major factors that helped this transformation were the emergence of an export oriented garment industry, boosting of rural income from migrants income abroad, and societal transformation in accepting women as part of a growing labor force.

Apart from a constitutional guarantee for equal rights for sexes, since its inception Bangladesh has adopted a policy that favored promotion of female education, and employment. Development plans since Independence have incorporated policies specific to women. Government’s education policy was specially targeted toward women including the Secondary School Stipend Program in the 1990s, which led to dramatic improvements in female educational attainment.

However, two other major phenomena, both driven mainly by the NGOs, would bring about a significant change in the lot of women in Bangladesh. One was the micro-credit movement, and the other female literacy movement through privately sponsored girls’ schools in the rural areas.

The micro-credit movement initiated by now famous Grameen Bank, and later incorporated by several other NGOs, unleashed a new strength for the rural unemployed women. They learnt how to save and get access to credit. It also created a sense of solidarity among these women to seek other services, such as family planning, to be delivered through them. International donors have observed that women’s awareness in many other spheres was enhanced through these collectives as they began to access other opportunities, including training and self-employment. Today, Grameen Bank has over 2500 branches spread over the nook and crannies of Bangladesh, with over 96% of members who are women. Total asset held by these branches was nearly $1.8 billion in 2010.

NGO sponsored educational services (pioneered by BRAC) were similarly intended to raise women’s status and to build an educated society in the newly independent country. With support from the government as well as local elites in rural areas, the educational services expanded rapidly and helped women to not only reduce the education gap with men, but in some cases outstrip them. To date more than 5 million children—mostly girls—have graduated from BRAC sponsored primary schools.

While the pro-women policies helped advancement of our women, other factors that contributed to the gender transformation were policies and government action in combating disease, child mortality, and improving sanitation. Bangladesh’s total sanitation campaign, which led to the widespread use of toilets, meant that girls could now attend school comfortably. Provision for clean drinking water, active program of immunization, and oral rehydration for babies reduced the incentives for families to have more children in rural areas.

Even as micro-credit and female education helped promote advancement of women, the sector that opened doors for millions to employment was manufacturing. With growth in exports of readymade garments, the employment opportunities for rural women increased manifold. The young and unemployed women of rural areas provided a much needed skill at a relatively low cost to the factories that were growing in large numbers to respond to international demand for low-cost readymade garments. Many of these women already had some sewing skills, and with training they provided the much needed labor to the factories. This generation of female workers forged a new identity for themselves away from their traditional roles as wives and mothers.

The spectacular achievement of past thirty years or so also leads to this important question, can this growth be sustained. Do these performances put our women in a continuous path of growth, education, and employment? Will women continue to have the support both from the government and the society at large to grow further?
Women in Bangladesh, for that matter in any country, are an integral part of the population. Therefore, policies and principles that support continued welfare of the population as a whole should be a prime condition to ensure advancement and development of women. Chief among these are continued public expenditure for expansion of education, training, health and sanitation, and good governance. The overall human development goals need to be buttressed with policies specific to women. These are dedication to the concept of gender equality, removal of any gender based discrimination in education and employment, and strict application of equality of justice to women in exercise of their rights, be it in property, marriage, or employment.

There are still many obstacles to attain higher levels of gender quality, and giving women their rights. As an International Agency recently observed, despite significant advances towards gender equality at the local and national levels, Bangladeshi women still have little right to make decisions, even in their own homes. Same is true about property ownership. Without property and other durable assets, women’s voice becomes even lower. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (1996) only 3.5 percent (0.62 million) of the 17.8 million agricultural holdings were female owned. Violence and insecurity still stifle women’s role in the development process. This has become a greater problem as more and more women seek employment in urban areas.

A running theme in this year’s Annual Meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as well as this year’s World Development Forum (from the World Bank) was gender equality, and the slogan was “Think Equal”. As I go over our achievement in reducing gender gap and gender inequality I am reminded of one of Gandhi’s statement on men and women. “There is no occasion for women to consider themselves subordinate or inferior to men....Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity....If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man’s superior....”.

In last forty years Bangladesh has come a long way. It has survived the forecast of doom and gloom from cynics and critics; it has achieved an economic and social growth that has put it in the threshold of graduating from least developed to middle income economy. However, in all this achievement our proudest contributors are our women. Thinking equal is a good start, but it will take more determined efforts, policy reforms, and change in our culture to be equal across gender. In Bangladesh we have a good beginning, but we may have more miles to go to treat our women and give them their rightful place in society. Preparing our legal system to protect their rights and give them power is an important condition of gender equality. With right support from our political leaders and the society I hope the next report on condition of women world-wide will place us among the top nations of the world.

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“Expanded gas development and trade are essential to Asia’s energy security and sustained economic growth, and especially in Bangladesh,“

With a gross domestic product (GDP) growing at more than 6 percent per year, Bangladesh is clearly a nation with great prospects.

“The Bangladesh economy moved on a path of rapid and sustained growth in 2011,” says the Central Bank of Bangladesh, noting that forecasted real GDP growth of 6.7 percent for fiscal 2011 was the highest since 1990. And industrial sector growth was over 8 percent.

And yet, the growth and prosperity of Bangladesh will ultimately depend on solving one of its greatest challenges: energy security. The country today faces a crisis in power supply, with both fuel and capacity well short of demand and frequent power outages.

‘Energy is the driver’

The International Energy Agency forecasts that global energy demand will increase by one third by 2035, with even greater growth in emerging economies. To meet this growth, energy companies and all countries including Bangladesh must invest in energy efficiency and build capacity in all forms of energy, from coal to renewables such as biomass and solar. In the meantime, gas -- clean, low-carbon, abundant and versatile -- can and must play a central role in meeting today’s energy needs and ensuring secure energy supplies for future generations.

Must grow gas supply

The most cost-effective way to help mitigate the current energy shortfall is to increase production
from existing Bangladesh gas fields, which presently supply most of the fuel for the country’s power plants. This is why Chevron, one of the country’s largest foreign investors and producer of nearly 45 percent of natural gas consumed in Bangladesh, is working to expand output at its three major fields -- Bibiyana, Moulavi Bazar and Jalalabad.

“Expanded gas development and trade are essential to Asia’s energy security and sustained economic growth, and especially in Bangladesh,” says Melody Meyer, president of Chevron Asia Pacific Exploration and Production. “Our Bangladesh team is committed to investing in growing production and working in partnership with Petrobangla and others to ensure the country makes the most of its gas resources.”

**Major Chevron expansion**

At Bibiyana, the largest field, the company is coordinating with the government and local communities to drill 10 new gas wells over the next two years. The company also plans to increase Bibiyana gas processing capacity by 50 percent.

Just as important, Chevron is coordinating with the national oil company, Petrobangla, on much needed projects to boost gas pipeline capacity with new gas compression stations and new pipelines. Together, these efforts are designed to help Chevron meet a request from Petrobangla to increase production by a targeted 500 million cubic feet per day – about 50 percent higher than 2011 levels.

“Chevron is uniquely positioned to help resolve the energy supply problem in Bangladesh, which for too long has constrained economic development and impacted millions of lives. We support the government’s goal to maximize energy potential by actively investing in domestic projects which deliver more gas,” says Geoff Strong, president of Chevron Bangladesh. “Bibiyana is our flagship project as we work alongside Petrobangla to increase the nation’s energy security.”

According to Strong, Chevron has steadily increased gas production during the past decade while ensuring the safety of workers and protecting communities and the environment. Efforts have included both exploration and development. And as of early 2012, the company’s tireless emphasis on safety has enabled its Bangladesh team to work nearly 30 million hours without any serious injuries.

“The natural gas we produce for Petrobangla plays a critical role in fueling the nation’s economic growth,” says Rumel Choudhury, Chevron’s Jalalabad Gas Plant superintendent. “Doing this in a safe and environmentally responsible manner makes us all extremely proud.”

**Working to diversify**

Bangladesh is working to diversify its energy sources under an energy strategy being advanced by the government’s Energy and Mineral Resources Division, which seeks energy security for the country “through supply of sustainable energy services for all at affordable prices and exploiting mineral resources in an environmentally sustainable manner.”
Priorities include emphasizing energy efficiency; harnessing renewable sources such as biofuels; increasing energy research and development efforts; pursuing liquefied natural gas imports as a potential enhancement to domestic supplies; and stepping up efforts to evaluate the nation’s coal supplies as potential future energy sources.

Already, notable strides have been made in renewables. A World Bank project focusing on rural electrification has funded the installation of more than 300,000 solar home systems with funding committee to enable the installation of 630,000 more. And a pilot power plant fueled by rice husks shows promise for biomass.

**Energy means investment**

Diversifying a nation’s energy mix takes time, however. So the country must work faster to optimize its domestic natural gas potential and transport infrastructure to promote growth in gas-fired electric power, key to increasing foreign direct investment.

According to a recent special report from the Asia Society, potential investors said the shortage of power generating capacity is one of the nation’s top infrastructure problems. The report cited World Bank data saying that the power crisis is responsible for a 2 percent loss in annual GDP.

“Power shortages and blackouts of up to eight hours a day have been common,” says the report. “This is by far the most serious problem facing the government, industry and the urban population.”

According to Ellen Goldstein, Bangladesh country director for the World Bank, national electric supply meets just 75 percent of peak demand and natural gas meets only 85 percent of daily demand. Bangladesh needs some $1.5 billion in new gas and power investment per year for the next 10 years.

**Bangladesh gas potential**

Studies suggest the country has the resource potential to address the problem. According to the Asia Society report, reserves of gas yet to be produced or discovered in Bangladesh range from 28 trillion cubic feet to as much as 50 trillion cubic feet. And Petrobangla has recently taken action to increase gas exploration, production and infrastructure to tap into this great potential.

Many believe legal, regulatory and fiscal frameworks must be reformed to attract more investment to Bangladesh’s energy sector. With a concerted effort to offer more opportunities and harness private investment to find more gas, outside companies could bear most of the considerable cost and risk associated with exploration. International companies like Chevron and Conoco -- which in 2011 was awarded new, deepwater exploration blocks in the Bay of Bengal -- bring capital, expertise and experience under a partnership model proven the world over.

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*Energy investment = jobs*
New investment from outside companies would also help create jobs. With the latest gas expansion efforts Chevron Bangladesh added several hundred Bangladeshi workers in 2011. The company currently has nearly 500 employees and some 2,500 contractors and service workers. Chevron’s past projects to build Bibiyana, its pipeline and other facilities created thousands of construction jobs.

Expanding its natural gas sector with partners, Bangladesh potentially has much more to gain than energy investment. As the relationship with Chevron has shown, world-class partners invest in communities as well. Working in partnership with local officials, government and non-government organizations such as Save the Children, Chevron programs today help more than 30,000 families in its project areas.

“Save the Children has worked for the children of Bangladesh for 40 years in education, health, food security and emergencies,” said Michael McGrath, country director, Save the Children. “Chevron’s support has helped create primary education opportunities for vulnerable children in Sylhet. We’re grateful for this support and hope to continue this partnership in the future.”

Supporting community health

Beneficiaries of Chevron Bangladesh’s Quality Education Support Initiative scheme

Another core Chevron program supports Smiling Sun Clinics in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development. Every month, approximately 6,000 Chevron neighbors receive health services from three clinics and 32 satellite clinics.

“I have seen the positive impact of the wonderful work of the clinics,” said Meyer. “We look forward to helping neighbors get the affordable, quality health care they need from the sincere and dedicated clinic staff and caregivers.”

As it grows the country’s gas supply, Chevron has also invested in training and resources to help more than 2,800 families in 55 villages to start new businesses. And the company has made schools and education a top priority, including programs to help underserved children and scholarships for more than 1,000 disadvantaged students.

Educating future generations -- and hiring and training Bangladeshis to work in Chevron’s energy operations -- further enhances energy security by building capacity in the nation’s energy work force. Plus, today’s young students will become the Bangladeshi business and government leaders of tomorrow. By working with gas development partners and other foreign investors to focus on schools and education, the nation can create an inexhaustible supply of human energy to make sure Bangladesh provides the energy required to achieve its great economic potential.

Jim Hendon is a former Chevron speechwriter and editor. The views expressed herein are those of the writer and do not reflect the position of the Embassy.
Export Processing Zones (EPZs) are designed to enhance integration of Bangladesh into the global supply chain and attract export-oriented investments. Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) Act provides the legal, institutional and incentive frameworks for the operations of the EPZs in the country. At present, we have eight export processing zones in operation namely Chittagong, Dhaka, Mongla, Comilla, Ishwardi, Uttara (Nilphamari), Adamjee & Karnaphuli.

**MODE OF INVESTMENT**

BEPZA attracts investment in three categories, namely: Investment with 100% foreign ownership; Joint venture between Bangladeshi and foreign investors; and Bangladeshi ownership.

**STRENGTHS OF BEPZA**

**Geo-regional location**

Bangladesh de facto is a bridge between South and South-East Asia, two regions experiencing remarkable economic growth. As these regions continue their trajectory of growth making them integral for global economic and financial progress and stability, Bangladesh is poised to emerge as the hub of this important economic nerve centre. Bangladesh also opens the gate to the seas to the South connecting countries in the neighborhood and beyond through waterways.
Human Resources

Bangladesh is endowed with an industrious work-force and we do offer the most competitive cost of labour. This workforce is diverse and trained or readily trainable to cater to job demands of different nature including managers, professionals, technologists, and middle to low-skilled workers.

One Window Service

Investors need only to deal with BEPZA for all of their investment and operational requirements. BEPZA assist the investors in providing a host of services including on-site services such as customs clearance, logistics, international countries, and offshore banking facilities

Protection of Foreign investment:

The Foreign Private Investment (Promotion and Protection) Act secures all foreign investment in Bangladesh. As a member of Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), USA insurance and finance programmes are operable in Bangladesh as well as in the EPZs. Bangladesh is a member of the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) which provides safeguards and security
under international law. The International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Dispute (ICSID) also provides additional means of remedy, whilst copyright interests are protected through World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

**Flexibility:**

BEPZA offers investment opportunities in convertible foreign currencies, providing investors with the flexibility of repatriating of both profit and capital. Investors may establish public or private companies in the EPZs and they also get benefit of 10 years tax holiday. The investors also enjoy GSP facility in EU countries, USA, Australia, Japan, Norway and duty and quota free access to Canada.

**Infrastructure Facilities:**

BEPZA provides infrastructure facilities for the investors. BEPZA provides fully serviced plots and standard factory buildings for setting up manufacturing industry. Investor can use these plots under a 30 years lease which is renewable. Apart from these plots, an investor may also take lease of Standard Factory Building (SFB) owned by BEPZA. All the utility connections such as electricity, water, internet & telecommunication are readily connected in the enterprises of the EPZs. BEPZA has also allowed setting up hi-tech infrastructure facilities like Central Effluent Treatment Plant, Water Treatment Plant, Inland Container Deport (ICD), Internet service provider, Power Generation Plant as service oriented industries in the EPZs.

**Support Facilities:**

BEPZA has allowed setting up of support service business facilities for the investors such as local and foreign banks, Off Shore Banking Units (OBU) insurance companies, C & F agent, freight forwarder and courier service in the EPZs. Other administrative facilities, such as Customs Office, Police Station, BEPZA’s Security, Fire Station, Public Transport, Medical centers etc are available in the EPZs.

**Who invested in EPZs**

Up to December, 2010, the total amount of actual investment in BEPZA stands at US$ 1906.07 million. 33 countries including S. Korea, Japan, China, Malaysia, Taiwan, U.S.A, U.K, Italy, Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, British Virgin Island, India, Sweden, Singapore, Pakistan, Panama, Switzerland, Belgium, Denmark, France, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Australia, Nepal, Mauritius, Ireland, U.A.E, Turkey, Ukraine, Marshal Island have already invested in the EPZs of Bangladesh.

**Flow Chart: Investment (Cumulative growth)**

**Conclusion**

BEPZA has successfully traversed a long way of 27 years to increase the volume of investment, diversification of export and thereby, employment generation and thus contributed to strengthen the economic base of the country.
Apart from achieving export earning objectives, EPZs have been making significant contribution to the gradual empowerment of women. This economic and social empowerment of women has far reaching effect on the country’s poverty reduction initiatives and attaining MDG goals. As increasing number of young women are joining the productive workforce of EPZs migrating from poverty prone remote rural areas of Bangladesh, EPZs are being referred to as role models of linking the rural economy with the industrialization process. As a result of its outstanding success, BEPZA has already got much recognition from the different parts of the world.


The World Bank has ranked Bangladesh 20th out of 187 nations for investors’ protection, making it as the best in South Asian Region, (Doing Business, 2010)

BEPZA’s Website: www.epzbangladesh.org.bd has recently been awarded with the “Runner UP” position in the rating of World Free Zone Competition held in Hydrabad, India.

With world class business environment and tailor made benefit packages for potential investors, BEPZA welcomes foreign investors to take the opportunity of investing in the EPZs of Bangladesh and ensure the maximum return on their investments.

The investors also enjoy GSP facility in EU countries, USA, Australia, Japan, Norway and duty and quota free access to Canada.

Flow Chart: Investment (Cumulative growth)
Meet Bangladesh: Shaping opportunities
- Dr. Syed Ferhat Anwar

Bangladesh Brand Forum (BBF), a promotional platform of the private sector of Bangladesh, started journey four years ago with intent to build Bangladesh brands and initiate nation branding exercise. As a part of this pursuit, BBF initiated “Meet Bangladesh” and presented Bangladesh in the United Kingdom, France, and United States of America (US). This article is an experience of the recently fulfilled visit to the US where in addition to the government a total of 15 private sector companies along with representatives from the media represented Bangladesh. United States was selected since Bangladesh is currently the 58th largest goods trading partner during 2009 and there is no doubt that huge improvement in this ranking is possible. On the other hand, goods imports from US totaled $577.5 million; Goods exports to US totaled $4.3 billion. The US goods trade deficit with Bangladesh was $3.7 billion in 2010. This indicates that US could cut down on the deficit through strategic investments in Bangladesh. It is evident from above that Bangladesh is not amongst the major interest countries for the US and thus there was every opportunity for Bangladesh to strengthen trade prospects resulting in strengthening political relationship.

BBF initiated this journey with a philosophical thought, “We as human beings must accept that the time that we have passed as our deeds are beyond our control and cannot be changed, though we can learn a lot from them; however, the time that is left is within our grasp, and our final result will be based on how we utilize this time”.

The project ‘Meet Bangladesh’ was based on some research findings that resulted in identifying four categories or groups of people:

- Those who have no idea about Bangladesh. They are primarily the mainstream people, including businessman, politicians, and the government representatives. They also comprise of a very small portion of the second or third generation Bangladeshi Diaspora who have practically no link with their motherland.

- Those who believe that Bangladesh had nothing to offer when Bangladesh is depicted as one of
the worst possible places on earth; her people are incapable of doing any worthwhile act, and whatever is achieved is probably by chance. Interestingly, these groups of people are part of a small portion of the Diaspora and a large portion of the local community led by some of the spokesperson of the country; furthermore, they consider themselves outside of this melee. A portion of the foreign government bodies who have had direct contact with the above category of people but have had no direct experience of Bangladesh and few businesses who in the past started business in Bangladesh using faulty entry strategy also belong to this group. The spokespersons of other nations who have reasons to ploy against Bangladesh are one other group who has been brandishing Bangladesh with this image.

- Those who sit on the fence. They are primarily the Bangladesh Diaspora who left the country to pursue personal goals and are happy with whatever they have achieved. Their knowledge base of Bangladesh is limited to what they read or see in the media and what they hear from their relatives. They love to prove that the decision they had made was right and feel sorry for the plight of the millions in Bangladesh.

- Those who believe Bangladesh has a lot to offer and her potentials are yet to be discovered. This group comprises the majority of businesses pursuing serious business in Bangladesh and represents both local as well as the foreign representatives. They also include a large youth population of the country and those at the bottom of the pyramid. They also comprise of a fairly good proportion of Diaspora entrepreneurs looking forward to invest in Bangladesh. Unfortunately they comprise only a handful of so called civil society, media representatives, policy makers and political representatives.

The above very clearly indicated that one had to be strategic in approach while pursuing Bangladesh interest outside the country. The basic learning from marketing in the form of addressing the right target market for the cause was clearly a very important factor. The purpose was very clear – building positive perception of Bangladesh. The fact that some of the economic sectors (especially agriculture) is still weak; health and education indicators are low. Infrastructure, while improving, is still far from satisfactory especially in electricity and communication network were taken into consideration. Corruption is certainly a major concern. The economic and administrative cost of securing business is high as well. However, all are also prospects for greater collaboration and improvement.

The Meet Bangladesh model therefore first assembled a group of people who are part of the fourth segment. Logically they were the right spokesperson for the country. They had every reason to believe that the promises made will be kept provided the right strategy was followed and the challenges considered as opportunities for improvement. Second, a number of groups in US were targeted namely – the culture lovers, the Bangladeshi Diaspora, the business community, the think tank, the political representatives, the government, and individual businesses. The summit was

Hon’ble Foreign Minister speaking at the US Chamber of Commerce ("Meet Bangladesh" event, October 2011)
stretched over four days within two major cities – New York (Culture, business & Diaspora) and Washington DC (business, Diaspora, think tank, policy makers & government). The major branding paradigms portrayed in the summit were as follows.

Art & Culture: In today's competitive dynamics, almost every single strategic thinker believe that the philosophical dimension of beauty, art and aesthetics can also refer to the sensing nature of decision making where intuition is just as much a part of the process as rational thinking. It is in this context that BBF chose a part of softer dimension, visual arts form, which not only portrays a simple combination of colors and forms but more importantly depicts the person and the culture behind the thought. Thus, contemporary arts of Bangladesh were displayed. The primary purpose was to prove that though in surface Bangladesh may seem to display several negative traits but deep within there lies an understanding that exudes in the form of depicting the understanding of the modern culture. This exhibition further stressed collaboration with US based academic and communication institutions.

Geo-Political positioning: In recent times, the South Asian region under the growth leadership of China and India are striding forward. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are right behind the two giants. This indicates that Bangladesh is at the centre of future growth and occupies a very important geo-political positioning in the future economic map of the world. Bangladesh is also a potential area for cooperation given the land-locked status of members in this region-Part of China, Nepal, North East part of India, Myanmar and Bhutan. This large potential market is the (South Asian Growth Center) SAGC. Under the circumstances, Bangladesh could play a critical role by providing easy access to SAGC not for the regional players but for the world at large. All the countries could gain tremendously from an integrated trade network which would boost trade and investment through reduction of the transaction cost. The closest link with the region is via the sea ports of Bangladesh. An added advantage of the region is that it lies at the crossroads between the regions of East and Southeast Asia on the one hand, and South Asia on the other. The region could use its strategic location within Asia to build links with other neighbors and could gain immensely from such cooperation.

It was also important to showcase that Bangladesh, unlike her neighboring countries, is purely a private sector driven economy. China and India are driven by public sector policies of the government; while Bangladesh is led by private sector initiative resulting in supportive policies of the government. Unites States being the strongest proponent of private sector led growth, very appropriately, a private-private partnership approach rather than FDI approach was worth exploring. The other major advantage Bangladesh holds through strengthening relationship with US lies in the fact that, the Bangladeshi Diaspora in the US is the greatest untapped asset in the form of knowledge bank for Bangladesh, under the prevalent global scenario; it will be prudent to expect greater collaboration. This is likely to not only strengthen economic and business base, but will also strengthen governance parameters.

Business: Some major options using a bilateral approach for market entry were highlighted. The case was made for the investors to indicate that the scale of investments were huge and these could be achieved through creation of private (Bangladesh) – private (US) partnership first followed by linking with the public sector in case of larger projects. The following facts were presented.

First, the prospects for infrastructure development:
• **Power Generation and Distribution:** Regarding power generation, it is evident that the expansion plan of the government clearly indicates a requirement of between 10,000 to 12,000 MW of electricity required in the next five years. This will further require extensive work on the distribution system. The source of power could be in several neighbouring regions. Furthermore, this is likely to open doors for energy marketing beyond Bangladesh borders.

• **Ports:** Prospect for a deep sea port is already on the working table, however, considering the above prospect, an additional port along Chalna and strengthening of all the major river ports along Padma-Meghna estuary. The major river ports include, Dhaka, Narayanganj, Chandpur, Barisal, and Khulna. It is evident that the port will be used by the region in general as proposed by the neighbors in recent times.

• **Riverways:** The country has approximately 8,500 kilometers of navigable waterways, of which up to 3,000 kilometers are main cargo routes. There are seasonal difficulties in the navigability of rivers and canals. This is primary due to siltation and erosion of river banks. This has resulted in wider rivers with lesser navigability due to lower depth. It is, therefore, essential that dredging along with narrowing of the rivers (based on original size) be undertaken. This will not only increase navigability but will also result in reclamation of land. This will result in opportunity for both enhanced transportation, creation of trade zones, as well as source of energy.

• **Roads & Highways:** The total road length of the country as of 2008 was approximately 300,000 kilometers of which 21,000 kilometers are main road. The national highways comprises of approximately 3500 kilometers while the regional highways constitute 4500 kilometers. The present national highways are over congested and comprise of two lanes. The trade potential requires at least four lane roads using preferably above ground level super highways. In recent times connectivity between south and far east has put emphasis on routes crossing Bangladesh.

• **Railways:** Bangladesh railways is almost 150 years old and linked with Indian West Bengal, Asam, and Tripura. At present only the West Bengal portion is open for traffic. The railways stretch almost 3000 kilometers 90% of which is single track and having a mix of broad, meter, and narrow gauge. It is imperative that the railways be made double track using only broad gauge. In addition, mono rails and underground railway are planned for Dhaka and other major cities which requires immediate attention to tackle traffic congestion.

**Second, prospects were informed about sectors beyond garments that represent the portfolio of Bangladesh trade basket.** The purpose was to indicate that Bangladesh can take advantage in several sectors. A few that were presented were.

• **Pharmaceuticals:** More than 250 companies are presently operating producing generics and fulfill 90% of the domestic demand while exporting to more than 20 countries. With 2016 very close, most of the off-patents are likely to generate prospects for Bangladesh becoming one of the major global hubs for contract manufacturing. In addition, as Bangladesh has made its presence in the biotechnology map through successful sequencing of jute genome, prospect for bio-informatics is also immense. Furthermore, Bangladesh being one of the most competitive manufacturers in the world, the export market could be of great potential.

• **Information & Communication Technology:** With India getting more expensive and specialized; Bangladesh is likely to take over at the bottom of the ICT pyramid. This will require working with niche products that suite the strength endowed in the trained human resource of the country.
the country. In addition a fair amount of training will be required to take advantage of prevailing global market demand.

- **Garments & Textiles:** Bangladesh is presently the second largest producer of garments. There is no doubt that the future expansion can be made in neighbouring India and Myanmar utilizing common labor force and vast unutilized land for economic zones. It is worth mention that Bangladesh at present contributes to less than 5% of the US demand. This is a clear indication of the fact that Bangladesh could be a valued partner using forward linkage strategy. It was also indicated that though Bangladesh exported a multibillion dollar worth of garments to the US, however, the real return to the workers was extremely low, which required greater consideration on part of the US government.

- **Agriculture and Agro-Processing:** The present loss due to lack of storage facility accounts for almost 25% of all fruits and vegetables grown in the country. Bangladesh has already moved into GM food which has resulted in higher productivity and thus has an immense opportunity to further expand its operations into higher value production for processing. In addition, the farmers of Bangladesh are presently working in the Middle East. Furthermore, private companies are operating outside Bangladesh utilizing cheap barren lands in prospective destinations. With the concept of SAGC, joint venture agriculture based industry is a clear option.

It was also important to learn that Bangladesh must properly portray herself across the globe.

Third, the proper use of natural resources is another distinct area requiring higher level of technological advancements that is seriously lacking in this region. It is essential to develop partnership between Bangladesh and the US to jointly explore the potential in the region.

Last but not the least, to achieve all the above, the partnership must entail entrenchment of high level of governance; ensure proper financial investment policy, and strengthening the skills level of the abundant human resource. This is another area where transfer of knowledge is likely to greatly benefit both Bangladesh and the region as a whole along with the partner.

The team also had to face a huge amount of criticism, especially from the second segment; however, the team addressed the issue jointly. It was very interesting to note that most of the concerns had very little to do with investment opportunities and future of businesses with Bangladesh. Some of the discussions are sighted below.

- In New York business meet, concern was raised regarding risks of investment. Example of ETV was sighted as a failure venture of Citi NA. The delegates requested the concerned persons to identify the number of failed ventures in the USA or any other comparable country with Bangladesh. It was clear that ETV venture had legal issues which could have been a strategic error on part of Citi NA.

- Clarifications were sought with regard to investment policy, issues related to public private partnerships, sectors of growth, etc. The interested investors were informed about the various benefits and strategic advantages in the policy. Comparisons with competing countries were also made to showcase the difference. In addition, the delegates were informed about the steps taken on digitalization, which is likely to both increase transparency and provide easy access to information. The interested delegates were invited to attend E-Asia.

- While discussing the prospects related to ports, concerns were raised as to why China was being considered for deep sea port. When the prospects regarding a second sea port was placed, it was interesting to observe that the investors knew little regarding such potential. At the same time some participants considered the presence of China as a threat to the US investors.

- Two major issues were considered extremely important for Bangladesh. Delegates strongly
recommended all to focus on issues of stock market turbulence and the transfer of funds. It was felt that both these would negatively affect the country if not taken into cognizance. Since during the meet Wall Street was experiencing secondary market disturbances as well, the participants discussed alternatives to fight back such damaging stance of the investors and ways of protecting the market. The members were of the opinion that opening opportunities to invest outside of Bangladesh will result in reduction of flight of foreign currency and thus strengthen the foreign currency base.

- Indian media representative made a point that Bangladesh had failed to protect the human rights and sighted example of extra judicial killings and labor unrest in the garments sector. In reply representatives of the business community as well as the foreign minister very clearly reminded the media representative that first Bangladesh was performing better than India in some of the human development indicators, second we are seriously taking the extra judicial killings into cognizance and third according to ILO Bangladeshi industries in general including the garments sector are performing far better than the neighboring countries, which perhaps could be a lesson for South Asia.

- Allegations were also raised regarding political arrests made in the name of ‘anti liberation forces’ which they thought seriously questions the democratic principle. The delegates were clearly united in asserting that trial by itself is a democratic process and many countries perhaps can learn from us in dealing with human rights resulting out of war and fighting with great patience even under pressure from many powerful countries of the world.

- While meeting the representatives from the congressman at Capitol Hill, the role of Grameen Bank and proper recognition of the bank was put forward and again the question of proper labor practice surfaced. The participants very clearly exchanged views with the congressman present recognizing not just the contribution of Grameen Bank but also that of Professor Yunus. It was stated that he has no doubt contributed towards the recognition of the country through fighting against poverty, but this is just one of our success stories and the world needs to know about the others.

- Issues were also raised where strengthening of relationship with India was stressed. The US government representatives were of the opinion that Bangladesh is likely to perform better if they operate under friendly terms with India. The recently concluded summit with India was highly applauded. The delegates recognized the importance of bilateral relationship with India; however, they also stressed on the relationship with countries such as US and China and regional cooperation (Europe, SAARC, etc.).

The major takeaways from the summit were far greater than the team had envisioned. The team clearly saw the interest countries like the US have in Bangladesh. It was also important to learn that Bangladesh must properly portray herself across the globe. In this context, the role of the media becomes highly important. At the same time Bangladesh needs to realize that internal strife will greatly weaken the cause of the country. It is evident that the differences at the operational level of the two major political parties is not very high, however, the media only talks about the differences, which seriously negates our cause. It was clear that we must stand high on our strengths and work on our weaknesses, rather than bicker on them. Perhaps the most important lesson learnt was that we must stand united to face any challenge. When country comes in question we must think in unison. It was great to see that even the foreign minister played the role of a member of private sector delegation with a single objective of portraying opportunities in Bangladesh.

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Bangladesh Diaspora in America can promote their country of origin in the United States in many ways. The first and foremost is to give a very fine account of themselves in the community in which they live and the organization in which they serve. When they hold high moral values and demonstrate good work ethics and efficiency, they automatically brighten the nation’s image abroad. When they take part in social and political activities in the communities or cities in which they live, it improves their own image and usefulness and that of their country. In fact, it can be mentioned that back home the work ethics of most people-in particular, the working class, is quite similar to that in USA.

The first generation of Bangladeshis in USA have not been able to play their due part because they were too busy establishing themselves economically and socially and educating their children. That phase is now over. Also, the newer generation has a lot of advantages-relative prosperity, the education and training in this country as well as familiarity with the language and cultural practices here. While the first generation achieved solidarity among themselves by forming their ethnic and cultural organizations and maintaining links with the country of origin, their progeny can look from their vantage position and forge ahead to fully participate in US affairs and integrating themselves in every way with the local and national organizations. It is an active, vibrant Bangladeshi Diaspora that would have the potentials of successfully promoting Bangladesh.

As yet, Bangladeshis abroad have not occupied key positions in the government, private sector or the academia to the extent that Indians or Pakistanis have. Latter had many more years of education, training and business exposure here compared to the young state of Bangladesh and its new immigrants. However after forty years of the country’s existence and many Bangladeshis coming
here during that period, the infancy stage has been crossed. It is now time to plan a more active role in the political groups, media and universities, voluntary organizations (e.g. Parent Teacher Associations, friends of local libraries and hospitals, local branches of political parties) and think tanks in USA.

I can think of some practical ideas to enhance the image of Bangladesh. The embassies of Bangladesh in major capitals of the world are now well staffed with smart, knowledgeable and gifted individuals. The staff and their family members have impressively performed, and are actively involved in community relations as well as in their operations at the centers of power and influence in Washington. A part of their time and talent in political, economic and public diplomacy may be dedicated to periodically briefing and encouraging the Bangladesh Diaspora to promote their country of origin.

The external publicity department back home can prepare talking points backed by background papers, highlighting Bangladesh's progress and achievements. This may include growth rate, educational advances particularly among women and their participation rate in education and employment, growing health facilities and the life expectancy of the people, advances in micro finance, garment and manpower exports, participation in UN peacekeeping missions and growth and diversity in agriculture. In quite a few areas like micro finance, availability of health services, including maternity and child welfare and education and employment of women, Bangladesh is often considered as a model for the world. Despite its deeply religious Muslim majority, it is regarded as a moderate country. The Embassies of Bangladesh in major capitals of the world are now well staffed with smart, knowledgeable and gifted individuals.
paper might also discuss the government’s plans for dealing with pending development problems and issues e.g. infrastructure, environment, water sharing and availability, poverty eradication and income disparities. Some of Bangladesh’s current political, social and economic shortcomings, including the security and human rights situations also need to be explained in the context of a forty-year old developing country’s learning period. A reference to the recent economic and social troubles in the developed world could help. In any case, without unduly minimizing our negatives, one should accentuate the positive, remembering that a balanced presentation would have more credibility.

The Embassy officials, visiting journalists, professors and other dignitaries from Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Diaspora may be encouraged and facilitated to speak and write on Bangladesh issues in the media, including the electronic media, press clubs, schools and universities and political and civic associations and in international organizations. Leading opinion makers, scholars, writers and Foreign journalists may be invited by eminent Bangladesh Diaspora to their homes in small and mixed groups for informally providing the true picture of the country and discussions on the subject. A few of them can also be encouraged to visit Bangladesh, given all facilities to freely travel and meet people without any monitoring to see for themselves the significant transformation of the country within forty years from a ‘Basket case’ to a modern self-reliant, enterprising and promising society.

It would be advisable to promote these visits through private-sector associations, independent universities and voluntary organizations in Bangladesh, preferably on the occasion of international conferences regularly held in Dhaka. The account of the country they may give on return will have a greater credibility and impact than anything Bangladeshis are able to convey. It could also provide an objective background to and favourably influence national and multilateral aid agencies and foreign direct investment.

Documentary films on the Grameen Bank have been shown in the CNN and PBS channels. In 2011, a large number of cinema halls had simultaneously screened an hour-long documentary about Grameen Bank’s activities in many parts of USA. Movies from and on Bangladesh are sometimes commercially shown in USA and in the UK. The British Council and the US Information Service abroad used to show art and science documentaries and even classic movies by invitation. The same can be done by our embassies on a selective basis. Some Bangladeshi fiction writers abroad writing about stories and events back home in English in The UK and USA have made quite a name for themselves, while successfully portraying life in Bangladesh. Paintings by Bangladeshi artists are being displayed and sold in the Boston area, thus introducing the life, art and culture of the country. These are some of the examples of innovative ways of promoting Bangladesh.

It should be kept in mind that in this day and age, with instant media coverage of all corners of the world, a country’s image cannot be improved simply by publicity and highlighting the positive aspects. The unity of the people and their commitment to a social contract for a democratic and tolerant society are essential. Unless within Bangladesh itself politics takes a healthy turn and avoids constant conflicts and intolerance, indefensible law and order and human rights situations, periodic instability and constitutional setbacks, the projection abroad of our considerable economic and social progress and achievements by itself may not have the desired impact.

Mr. Azizul Jalil is a retired World Bank official and columnist. The views expressed herein are those of the writer and do not reflect the position of the Embassy.
Introduction

The Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna (henceforth, GBM) (Fig. 1) river system is the third largest freshwater outfall to the world’s oceans. The two rivers flow through a number of countries in the South Asian region, including China, India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Of these, China contributes solely to the flow of the Brahmaputra, and Nepal to the flow of the Ganges. These two rivers often overflow during the monsoon months and then reduce dramatically in the dry season. The region, therefore, faces two major hazards—floods during the monsoon and scarcity of water during the dry season. These hazards become more pronounced in the downstream regions, particularly in Bangladesh.

Increasing population and accelerating economic development activities in the basin of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra have now made the sustainable water management of the region even more critical than in the past. The sharing of water resources has long been a matter of dispute among the four co-basin countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal. This has been the hydro political bone of contention in the region for more than three decades, and because of its geographical location, Bangladesh faces the most contentious water issues. In terms of overall water resources requirement for the region, the Ganges has abundant water resources if its total annual flow is considered. The main problem is water scarcity during the lean season, from January to April, which affects both India and Bangladesh. The situation is particularly critical for Bangladesh, as about 80% of its annual fresh water supply comes as transboundary inflows through 54 common rivers with India.

The effect of climate on hydrology in Tropical Asia has many facets. In the Himalayas, the storage of precipitation in the form of snow and ice (in glaciers) over a long period provides a large water reservoir that regulates annual water distribution. The majority of rivers originating in the Himalayas have their upper catchments in snow-covered areas and flow through steep mountains. By and large, dry-season flow in the major Himalayan Rivers in a given year results from the monsoon rainfall of the previous year; and the run-
off in Bangladesh is the result of rainfall in the upper catchments India (Chowdhury and Ward, 2004; also see references therein). Therefore, if there is any climatic change in the mountain hydrological regimes, it is likely to alter these resources and severely affect Bangladesh, which depends on this water resource. Recently some atmospheric and climatic changes in the hydro-meteorological system in the GBM river system have been observed and again, the effects are more pronounced in Bangladesh. The objective of this study is therefore to summarize the basin-wide hydro-meteorological variability and discuss the variability and changes on the livelihood of the people in Bangladesh.

**Hydro-Meteorological Variability in the GBM River System**

Recent observations revealed changes in the length of the monsoon season and, in some cases, the increased precipitation generated additional volumes of runoff and flooding. Also, when the Southwest monsoon arrives later or withdraws earlier, soil moisture deficits in some areas (especially in the Ganges basin) worsens. The prolonged monsoons also contribute to more frequent flooding and increase the depth of inundation in many parts of Bangladesh (for example, the flooding in 1988 and 1998; see Chowdhury, 2000). The number of tropical cyclone events has also recently increased. Scientists theorize that all these hydro-meteorological changes are the result of changing climate. The next section summarizes the responses of key local climate indicators (i.e., rainfall and run-off, cyclone, and sea level) to changing climate.

**Rainfall and run-off variability in Bangladesh:** Study of the decadal trends in the rainfall variability in Bangladesh revealed that significant deviation of monthly rainfall from one decade to the other has occurred. For example, in the Ganges basin the June rainfall in 1970-60 displayed a positive anomaly (i.e., higher than average) but now shows a negative anomaly (i.e., lower than average) in the recent decade 2000-90 (Fig. 2). It has also been observed that, compared to 1970-60, there is a considerable increase (10-15%) in September rainfall in the recent decade; all other monthly deviations are notable as well. Rainfall in the Brahmaputra basin also displayed similar trends. June rainfall shows a negative trend while the percentage of Aug-Sep rainfall, as compared to 1970-60 has significantly increased in recent decades. Other months displayed considerable variations too. Therefore, some atmospheric and climatic changes in the hydro-meteorological system in Bangladesh are very distinct (rainfall anomaly in the Meghna basin is not reported here). These findings show that the variations of total seasonal rainfall, the timing of onset, peak, and recession are changing considerably at a dramatic pace. Factors related to changing climate and human induced interferences to natural environment are hypothesized to be responsible for these changes.
Because there are significant deviations in timing of onset, peak, and recession of seasonal rainfall, these changes severely affect the river flows inside Bangladesh as basin-wide rainfall and run-off are significantly correlated (Chowdhury and Ward, 2004). These cause rivers to dry when water is scarce and does overflow when it is abundant. This dry/wet stage is more distinct during El Niño / La Niña years [(i.e., El Niño years are associated with decreased flows (dry) while La Niña years are associated with increased flows (wet)] (see Chowdhury, 2003; Chowdhury and Ward, 2007; Chowdhury, 2010).

The severe water shortage (drought) and excessive water (flooding) affects almost every sector in Bangladesh, including the overall livelihood of the people (Fig. 4). Alarmingly, this also creates a scarcity of clean drinking water at a dramatic pace in both urban and rural areas (e.g., arsenic contamination).

1 El Niño is caused by major warming of the equatorial waters in the Pacific Ocean. In this case, the anomaly of the sea surface temperatures (SSTs) in the tropical Pacific increases (+0.5 to +1.5 deg. C in NINO 3.4 area from its long-term average (e.g., the Niño 3.4 Region is bounded by 120°W-170°W and 5°S-5°N.) (Fig. 3). On the other hand, La Niña is caused by major cooling of the same equatorial waters in which case the anomaly of the SSTs in the tropical Pacific decreases (-0.5 to -1.5 deg. C in NINO 3.4 area) from its long-term average (Fig. 3).
Tropical Cyclone variability in Bangladesh: If we synthesize the most recent cyclone history, we seem to have already experienced three major cyclones—Sidr in 2007, and Bijli and Aila in 2009. So the question is, are these cyclones and related extreme weather events becoming more frequent and are they linked to changing climate? The answer is yes!! From an historical perspective, most of the major cyclones that hit Bangladesh were during El Niño /La Niña years. So the question becomes, do El Niño/La Niña events intensify the threat of cyclone activities in Bangladesh? Again, the answer is yes! To provide some background, the top cyclones (since 1960) and activities of El Niño/La Niña events during those years are presented below.

- **May 28-29, 1963:** A severe cyclonic storm lashed Chittagong, Noakhali, Cox’s Bazar and the coastal islands of Sandwip, Kutubdia, Hatiya, and Maheshkhali killing about 11,520 people. A moderate El Niño event was active in the Pacific basin during that time.

- **November 12, 1970:** A devastating cyclone hit the entire coast of Bangladesh with a maximum wind speed of 222-km per hour causing 10 to 20 feet of high tidal surge. It practically destroyed Bhola and surrounding coastal areas (Fig. 5 (left)). The official death toll was 500,000, but the unofficial figure was about 120,000. A strong to moderate La Niña event was active during that time.

- **May 24-25, 1985:** A severe cyclone hit Chittagong, Cox’s Bazar, Noakhali, and the coastal islands causing 10 to 15 feet of high tidal surge killing about 11,069 people. A moderate La Niña event was active during that time.

- **April 29-30, 1991:** A cyclone hit Bangladesh late at night on April 29. The maximum wind speed reached 225-km per hour. Coastal damage due to this cyclone was huge (Fig. 5). The official death toll was 150,000. A moderate El Niño event was active during that time.

- **November 29-30, 1997:** A cyclone hit Chittagong. The maximum wind speed was 224-km per hour. A strong El Niño event was active during that time.

- **November 15, 2007:** Cyclonic storm Sidr hit Bangladesh. This cyclonic storm strengthened to reach peak sustained winds of 215-km per hour and intensified to a Category 4-equivalent cyclone on November 15. A total of 650,000 people in Bangladesh evacuated to emergency shelters. Approximately 3,447 deaths were blamed on the storm according to governmental sources. The unofficial death toll was estimated to be between 5,000 to 10,000 people. During this time a La Niña of moderate strength was established in the central and eastern Pacific.

- **April 14-15, 2009:** Cyclonic storm Bijli hit the ports of Chittagong and Cox’s Bazar with heavy rain and wind gusts of up to 90-km per hour. Officials said that hundreds of thatched houses were destroyed but that the damage was minimal in part because of evacuation efforts. During this period La Niña had started to gradually weaken, increasing chances for transition from La Niña to

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**Figure 5:** Image of the devastating damages of the deadliest ever recorded Bhola cyclone to hit Bangladesh on November 12, 1970 (left); coastal damage (i.e., flooded villages and fields) after the 1991 cyclone (right).
May 27, 2009: Tropical cyclone Aila hit Bangladesh. According to the Associated Press, around 2.3 million people were affected by Aila, many of them stranded in flooded villages (Fig. 6). Storm surges flooded agricultural areas with salty water. Hundreds of thatched houses were destroyed (Fig. 6). The death toll was low (about 121 deaths) because of effective evacuation efforts. During this period the equatorial Pacific was warmed (i.e., an El Niño-like event occurred).

The above chronology shows that most of the major cyclones that hit Bangladesh in different periods occurred during either an El Niño or La Niña year, or a transition period from one event to another. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (1993, 2002d), which has records on cyclones over the last 200 years, it was found that the number of occurrences of major cyclones has drastically increased in recent decades. While only three cyclones occurred during the periods of 1795-1845 and 1846-1896, the number increased to 13 during 1897-1947 and 51 during the period of 1948-1998. Also, as compared to 1950-1980, the numbers of El Niño/La Niña events have considerably increased between 1981 to 2009. As mentioned previously, the increasing number of El Niño/ La Niña events is partly the result of global climate change. This trend is likely to continue further, with perhaps even more frequent El Niño/ La Niña events.

Sea level rise: Most parts of Bangladesh are less than 12 m (39.4 ft) above the sea level (http://www.bdembassyusa.org/index.php?page=geography), and it is believed that about 17.5% of the land would be flooded if the projected sea level were to rise by 1 m (3.28 ft) by the year 2100 (http://static.weadapt.org/placemarks/files/225/golam_sarwar.pdf). It has been observed recently that the South Talpatti Island, which has been disputed over for three decades, is simply no longer there (Fig. 7). This is only part of the incredible loss of land seen in the Bay of Bengal over the last few years. Sea level is rising in the Sundarbans, which is the largest single block of tidal mangrove forest in the world (Fig. 7).

According to the Intergovernmental panel on Climate Change (IPCC)-Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) (available at http://www.ipcc.ch/), global average sea level rose at a rate of 1.8 \(\pm\) 0.5 mm per year over the period from 1961 to 2003, without the contribution of ice flow. With the contribution of increased ice flow at the rates observed from 1993 to 2003, the average sea level rose about 3.1 \(\pm\) 0.7 mm per year. What is important to note here is that the 1.8 \(\pm\) 0.5 mm per year projections made by IPCC-AR4 did not include the full effects of rapid ice flow changes in its projected sea level
ranges. This is also true for Bangladesh where model based projections are made without considering the full effect of ice-melt. However, considering the dynamic effect of ice-melt contribution to global sea level rise, several new studies estimate that by the year 2100 the sea level rise would be approximately three times as much as projected by the IPCC-AR4 assessment. Even for the lowest emission scenario (B1) (http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/wg1/en/spmsspmp-projections-of.html), sea level rise may even come closer to 2 meter by 2100. However, despite uncertainties recent studies have emphasized consideration of the possibility of a faster rate of rise (i.e., 2 m by 2100) than suggested by the IPCC-AR4. In fact, the author and his team have already observed a faster rate of rise in the vicinity of the western Pacific islands. Similar ice-melt based sea level projections for Bangladesh are not currently available. However; if projected, the result is likely to be the same (i.e., 2 meter rise by 2100 and more severe inundations) as projections for the Pacific islands; the Bangladesh climate is also sensitive to El Niño/ La Niña and has also been recording a positive trend.

Recent Water and Power Crisis in Bangladesh: Shall We Blame Changing Climate?

The following example illustrates how the changing climate is affecting people’s daily life in Bangladesh. There are many other similar examples; however, the most recent (and mostly overlooked) one is examined here. This is a ‘brain-storming case example’ that shows how the globally changing climate affects the daily life in Bangladesh.

As previously mentioned, the climate in Bangladesh is sensitive to El Niño/La Niña. Dry spells of El Niño seriously affect both the water and power sectors in Bangladesh. El Niño is blamed for a lack of rainfall and resulting water shortages, which in turn starves the hydroelectric dams. In daily life, the dry spells also increase the demand for water (i.e., people consume more water, take longer showers, etc.) and power (i.e., increased use of air coolers, fans, etc.). The increased frequency of El Niño conditions, which is the result of changing climate, is partially blamed for the recent water and power crisis in Bangladesh.

The power problem in Bangladesh is nothing new and certainly, even without El Niño or climate change, the country has already suffered the effects of severe power shortages. What is noticeable here is that the recent El Niño made the problem of water and power crises even worse. The country of Venezuela is a classic example, where President Chávez pointed the finger of blame for the country’s water and power crises at weather changes and said “It’s El Niño.” (see http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=138476).

Discussions and Conclusions

In Bangladesh, everyone agrees that we are in the midst of a freshwater crisis. Inside Bangladesh, rivers, lakes, and aquifers are dwindling faster than Mother Nature can possibly replenish them and industrial and household chemicals are rapidly polluting what’s left. Meanwhile, the increasing population in the GBM region raises demand for more water in each country of the region. As the race to control water resources around the planet is gathering speed, the GBM region is also currently seeing a rush to gain control over precious water resources. In India and the upper riparian country of Bangladesh, dams are being constructed to control water resources. As a result of the changing climate and human interference in the region, some parts of Bangladesh may become much more prone to drought and flooding in the coming decades.
climate and human interference in the region, some parts of Bangladesh may become much more prone to drought and flooding in the coming decades. We need to be particularly cautious about drought, which is widely believed to exacerbate regional conflict (e.g., the killings in Darfur, Sudan; also see http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=100387) because freshwater is the resource most vital to human existence. The increasing number of tropical cyclones due to more frequent El Niño/ La Niña events (i.e., Cyclone Thane hit on 31 December 2011, in a moderate La Niña year) is another critical issue. The third major concern is the rising sea level. If we incorporate the dynamic effect of snow-melt in long-term global sea level projection, the rising trend will be faster in Bangladesh and may inundate more than the originally estimated 17.5 percent of land by the year 2100.

The whole GBM region is under serious threat of climate change and human interference with the natural environment, however, this threat is most severe in Bangladesh. The critical question is what can be done to save the vulnerable communities in Bangladesh? We understand that there are no easy answers but some immediate responses are justified. Current events are already stressed and the future outlook, even more so. As mentioned, some possible options include adaptation and mitigation. Adaptation is a local and regional scale response justified by current events and Bangladesh, as compared to many other similarly vulnerable countries, has made considerable progress in its local response efforts to changing climate. However, as an adaptation strategy in the regional context, the leaders of GBM region countries have to think seriously about sharing legitimate water resources, exchanging climate information (see Chowdhury, 2000), and developing a regional climate outlook for a comprehensive and participatory approach to climate hazards management in Bangladesh (see Chowdhury, 2005). However, mitigation is a geopolitical problem requiring consensus policy goals and exceptional international agreement. This is a challenging task and we are cautiously optimistic over this future!

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Bangladesh is the hub of a spoke that includes the fastest growing regions of Asia: China to the north, India to the west and east and Southeast Asia. Its geostrategic position gives it a role in stabilizing this critical area through linking the various regions together. It is in the US interest that it succeeds in this effort as that would strengthen the US interest in a peaceful area focused on economic growth that leads to the improvement in the lives of the hundreds of millions of people within South Asia and in its neighborhood. A better life for the people reduces the opportunities for political and religious radicalism that often takes an anti-American orientation. Great regional cooperation also reduces the chances for conflict in Asia that would have grave international consequences given the growing importance of Asia in shaping the direction of the world economy.
The pendulum of power is again shifting to Asia after a 300 year hiatus – and whether that shift is peaceful depends on greater cooperation among its regions –and Bangladesh can play a significant role in making this happen.

Following hundreds of years of colonial exploitation, Bangladesh, independent since 1971, is again beginning to reclaim its legacy as a regional commercial hub and the link between South Asia and neighboring regions to the north, west and east. Over the past twenty years, the country has experienced what some refer to as a “Development Surprise” with GDP growth at a sustained 6 – 7 percent each year and social welfare indices among the best in South Asia. The rich alluvial soil of this area made it historically the most prosperous area of the Mughal Empire (at its height from early 1500s to early 1700s), producing profits for a flourishing manufacturing base. In an earlier version of the current “Look East” policy of the states of South Asia, ports along the rivers of Bengal, and Chittagong and Mongla on the Bay of Bengal, were the major centers of trade from South Asia with Southeast Asia and China. Bangladesh is now working to resume its historic importance as the geostrategic hub—and it has the support of the US in this quest.

The Geostrategic Legacy

The historic importance the area that now forms the state of Bangladesh was impressive indeed. Bengal was the core economic region of the Mughal Empire, estimated to have one quarter of the world’s GDP as late as 1700 on the eve of European colonial domination of South Asia. Major business families in Bengal were integrated into the Mughal trading system which provided business opportunities in the rich Gangetic plains of north India and further to the west into Central Asia and Persia. With the penetration of European overseas trading companies into India, Bengal’s business families took advantage of the new trading systems to Southeast Asia and China to make huge fortunes exporting textiles, sugar, indigo, carpets, opium and spices. Many of the ships that carried this trade were built in shipyards along the coast of what is now Bangladesh and the crews of those ships were sailors from this area, reflecting an ancient maritime tradition only recently being reclaimed.

But European domination ultimately undermined the indigenous industry and the business and banking conglomerates in Bengal, as in the rest of the subcontinent. It is estimated that the average GDP growth rate of India in the last century of British rule was only between one or two percent a year – and the Bengal area, especially the eastern districts that were to become Bangladesh, became increasingly marginalized. Bengal moreover was episodically consumed by famines due to inadequate investment in irrigation and connectivity, the last famine being the Great Bengal famine during World War II when millions of people died. The formation in 1947 of an independent Pakistan, whose eastern wing is present day Bangladesh, did not produce a significant improvement in the economy of East Pakistan. The western wing dominated the new country and used profits from the exports of East Pakistan’s natural resources to help fund the development of industry and infrastructure mainly in the western part of the country.

Rebuilding the economy of the new Bangladesh after the devastating 1971 war for independence took at least two decades to show results, and the GDP growth rate in the past decade and a half has been a consistent robust 6 – 7 percent a year. Restoring prosperity at home is necessary if Bangladesh is to play its desired role as a facilitator of regional cooperation. Goldman-Sachs has predicted that Bangladesh is among the “Next Eleven”, countries that have a high potential of becoming, along with the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, South Africa and China), the world’s largest economies in the
It now ranks as 43rd largest with a per capita income of approximately 1,700 dollars (in Purchasing Power Parity terms). The economy has more than doubled over the past two decades. This effort to grow the economy has benefited from the lack of inter-ethnic tensions that exist in India and Pakistan, a consensus on the legitimacy in the democratic process, and a high degree of social equality, due to several factors such as comprehensive land reforms in the 1950s and a population that adheres largely to a tolerant and inclusive form of Sufi Islam. A cadre of young innovative entrepreneurs has emerged over the past decade to give a boost to private enterprise that will serve the nation well in the future as the driver of its economy, as in next door India. Capital has been raised by a surge in exports of garments, a ten-fold expansion since 1990, and a similar growth in remittances from the large Bangladeshi diaspora. This capital has been used to upgrade the apparel and fabric industry and to expand into new industries, such as petrochemicals and pharmaceuticals.

Economic development is at the top of the Bangladesh Government’s agenda and the consensus is that policy has a strongly pro-growth orientation, perhaps the result of a parliament in which a substantial majority is men and women from the world of business. However, there are still major improvements to be made in governance and on the issue of corruption. Low-lying Bangladesh, moreover, is highly vulnerable to global warming and its future will depend heavily on the pace of such warming. While the country is growing at a sustained rate, it needs to increase the average GDP economic growth rate from the present 6-7 percent per year to 9-10 percent a year to reduce the high poverty rate and to generate additional investment for infrastructure.

Location, Location, Location: Where you are is what you are

Just as location plays a major role in determining the value of property, it also is a vital factor in determining the options leaders face in protecting a country’s security and advancing its economic prospects. Bangladesh is a densely populated country of 57,000 square miles surrounded by India on three sides, and with a rather short land border with Myanmar and facing out south to the Bay of Bengal. An Indian corridor some twenty miles wide separates the northern border of Bangladesh from Nepal and Bhutan. Slightly to the northwest is China about a hundred miles away. This northeastern area of the South Asian subcontinent provides a natural geographic area in which all the member states would benefit by cooperating with each other. Bangladesh is the core part of this resource rich area which contains a cornucopia of metals, substantial oil and gas resources, abundant fresh water, huge hydro electrical potential, some of the richest soil in the world, and natural attractions for a robust tourist industry. This is, however, a still a largely undeveloped area with enormous potential for growth.

Bangladesh as noted above is the hub of a spoke linking it to three of the world’s richest areas. To the north is fast developing China. To the west is India, the world’s second fastest growing economy and to the southeast is Southeast Asia, still another of the major growth areas in the world. What is lacking is infrastructure in Bangladesh to connect these areas. The most immediate need is infrastructure to connect commercial traffic from India through Bangladesh to the Southeast to take advantage of India’s “Look East” policy and its fast growing economy. Equally important is creating a free trade zone for the larger northeastern region of the subcontinent to remove the present legal obstacles to trade. Stronger linkages would also reestablish the natural east-west axis of trade between the two parts of pre-partition Bengal. Still another advantage of this connectivity to the west is the linkage of Bangladesh to a developing corridor of trade stretching from India into Central Asia. With such cross border trade would come substantial transit fees and related development projects. China for its part is looking for ports facing on the Indian Ocean for the fast developing areas of inner China, and it has already provided funds for the expansion of the Chittagong port and for a road connection from China to the port city. These and other ports are also logical destinations for trade to and
cooperation on water issues because the country is crossed by dozens of rivers, many which are shared with India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and China. The interdependence of rivers among these states calls for a high level of cooperative planning to maximize the use of a scarce resource, to reduce the danger of flooding and to limit the potential for inter-state tensions. Especially sensitive is the withdrawal of water by upstream states, and Bangladesh is highly dependent on waters that flow in from India and Nepal from the west (e.g., the Ganges), the north (e.g., the Teesta) and the east (e.g., the Brahmaputra which originates in China). The South Asian states are beginning to look at water as a “regional commons” requiring multinational attention and the US should support such efforts. Related to this, regional states are starting to address the issue of glacier melt as the Himalayan range contain the largest glaciers outside the Arctic and Antarctic, glaciers whose discharge impacts on the volume of water that flow down into the subcontinent. South Asia, including Bangladesh, is energy short and the dramatic drop in altitude from the Himalayan Mountains to its foothills creates potential to exploit the many rivers flowing downward to South Asia for a vast increase in energy from hydropower.

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Bangladesh in fact has a record of looking for multilateral solutions to regional problems. This is witnessed in its taking the lead in the formation of the South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in the 1980s and pushing member states to participate more actively in SAARC. Yet, the record of cooperation has not been good. South Asia is among the least integrated regions of the world. Only two percent of the trade of regional states, for example, is with each other versus about 20 percent for East Asia. There is moreover comparatively little energy sharing among states and so far none with Bangladesh, an issue that is about to be remedied by the impending connection of India's electrical grid system with that of Bangladesh, with potential to link it further with that of Nepal and Bhutan. Still another sign of the limited regional links is the fact that only seven percent of the region’s international telephone calls are within the region, versus about 70 percent in East Asia. While a South Asia Free Trade Association (SAFTA) has been established, again with Bangladesh in the lead, the barriers to regional trade remain high, primarily due to extensive negative lists on trading items, to the lack of infrastructure connecting the region, and to lack of intra-regional investment, even though savings rates within the region are at a relatively high level between 30-35 percent.

Due to market reforms in the 1990s that reduced the intrusive power of the state and encouraged globalization, South Asia after East Asia has become the world's fastest growing region, averaging about 6 percent growth of GDP a year since 1990. This growth differs from that of China in that the force behind it is private enterprise and not the state. The next set of reforms will have to stress significantly enhanced capital investment in infrastructure and regional cooperation and it suits US interest to encourage investment in Bangladesh.

So far, distrust of India, dwarfing the other South Asian states in size, population and wealth, has worked to stunt the effectiveness of SAARC or the formation of other regional groups to address regional issues. India for its part did not push for a greater integration of the region, in part due to the sure resistance of Pakistan. But over the past few years, the ideological barriers to enhanced regionalism seem to be diminishing due to a growing recognition that further economic growth in the individual states requires much greater regional cooperation. The government of Sheikh Hasina has done a superb job in developing closer relations with India, which surrounds Bangladesh on three sides, without stoking a latent anti-Indian sentiment that has in the past blocked effective cooperation between the two countries. Her government has also encouraged enhanced economic ties to China without arousing undue concern in India. Her government has worked on the assumption that relations with the two nearby giants is not a zero-sum situation, but rather a relationship based on self-interest – and it is in the self-interest of Bangladesh to have good relations with both India and China. It is also in the US for these two Asian giants to have amicable relations.

**Geostrategic Security Issues**

Geographic barriers have tended historically to insulate South Asia from security threats from regions to the north and east. Creating a security mantle around the region were the Himalayan Mountains that stretch along the north with long extensions to the east and west and the Indian Ocean to the south. What external involvement occurred came through the passes along the western spur of the Himalayan Mountains, the historic invasion routes into the subcontinent from Central Asia. Modern technology has overcome these traditional barriers. The ocean moat was breached first by the Europeans in the 16th century because they developed naval technology enabling round the world navigation. The apparently impregnable mountains to the north did not prove a significant obstacle to the fighting between China and India in their 1962 war fought...
just across the border from Bangladesh in the high Himalayas and its foothills. A nightmare security dilemma for Bangladesh would be resumed hostilities between neighboring India and China because Bangladesh could become a pawn in the jockeying for power between these two neighboring giants. Over the past two decades, India and China, however, have significantly improved their bilateral ties, led by a booming trade between the two countries. Good relations between India and China serve the economic and security interests of Bangladesh – and serves US interests as well.

Bangladesh itself faces no immediate conventional security threat from any of its neighbors, though the movement of terrorist and ethnic dissident forces across porous borders stokes violence within the country and undermines bilateral ties with India and potentially with China. Bangladesh’s major security problem is thus at home and the country’s leadership is now cracking down on radical political forces that work against the regional cooperation on which the country’s economic and security futures depend—and against the traditional religious tolerance that provides an empowering context for democracy. The threat of extremist radicalism showed up early in the regime of Sheikh Hasina in 2009 with a revolt of a part of the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles against senior officers. This threat was overcome by close cooperation between the civilian government of Sheikh Hasina and the military. An improving economy within the context of democracy is the best remedy to such threats from domestic radicalism and the danger of it lapping across into India and other neighboring areas.

The present government appears to operate, rightly in my view, on the assumption that the future geostrategic importance of Bangladesh will depend on channeling nationalism in the direction of a better life for its people and a foreign policy that focuses on establishing a nexus between improved regional relations and domestic economic growth. This approach also suits the US interest in regional stability. Perhaps no country in South Asia is so dependent on regional cooperation for its future economic growth and security than Bangladesh. With the current focus on economic growth by Bangladesh and all its neighbors, the prospect for regional collaboration – and for Bangladesh – seems quite good. It is in the US interest to encourage Bangladesh to take on this role as a facilitator of regional cooperation.

Dr. Walter Andersen is Director, South Asia Studies Program, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, USA. The views expressed herein are those of the writer and do not reflect the position of the Embassy.
Glimpses of Embassy Activities

Hon’ble Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni, MP with US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton at the US State Department

Hon’ble Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni, MP speaking at the inaugural ceremony of Machine Readable Passport and Visa

H.E. Akramul Qader speaking at Martyrs’ Day and International Mother Language Day

H.E. Akramul Qader speaking at National Mourning Day
H.E. Akramul Qader with Congressman Geoff Davis

H.E. Akramul Qader speaking before the former Peace Corps volunteers

H.E. Akramul Qader with Dr. Rajiv Shah, USAID Administrator and US Ambassador to Bangladesh Mr. Dan Mozena

H.E. Akramul Qader speaking at the birth anniversary of National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam

H.E. Akramul Qader speaking at a seminar organized by US-Bangladesh Business Advisory Committee

H.E. Akramul Qader speaking at the solo painting exhibition of Ms. Monica Jahan Bose, a Bangladeshi-American painter
US Ambassador Dan Mozena with Mr. Jashim Uddin, Charge D’Affaires, a.i

A Paraguayan performer at Martyrs’ Day and International Mother Language Day program

Audience at Embassy Open House

CDA ai Mr. Jashim Uddin speaking at Armed Forces Day

Audience at a program on the occasion of Martyrs’ Day and International Mother Language Day

Mr. Scott Butcher, a former US diplomat and a co-signatory of Blood telegram in 1971
H.E. Akramul Qader speaking at a Bangla New Year program in Florida

Hon’ble Home Minister Sahara Khatun speaking at a program at the Embassy

Hon’ble Minister Dr. Hasan Mahmud speaking at US Department of State

H.E. Akramul Qader with the former Peace Corps volunteers

Hon’ble Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni, MP with USAID Administrator Dr. Rajiv Shah

Hon’ble Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism GM Qader at a meeting with the US officials
Hon. Minister of State for Cultural Affairs Mr. Promode Mankin speaking on Victory Day program at the Embassy

Members of Bangladesh Parliamentary Committee interacting with the faculty of University District of Columbia

Mr. Sajib Wazed, Adviser to Hon’ble Sheikh Hasina and H.E. Akramul Qader at ceremony on US-Bangladesh Business Relations

H.E. Akramul Qader at a meeting on US-Bangladesh Trade relations

Reception at the Capitol Hill held in connection with the Branding Bangladesh event DSC04875

National and Independence Day Reception
Audience enjoying the cultural program at Embassy Open House

Flag hoisting by H.E. Akramul Qader on Victory Day, December 16

Members of Bangladesh Embassy family performing at Pohela Boishakh program

Members of Bangladesh Embassy family performing at the 150th birth anniversary of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore

National War College visits the Embassy

Members of Bangladesh Embassy family performing at the birth anniversary of National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam
H.E. Akramul Qader speaking at the USAID

H.E. the Ambassador with the students of Johns Hopkins University

Mrs Rifat Sultana Akram, wife of Bangladesh Ambassador to the USA speaking at the Bangla new year program

Children performing at the program to celebrate 40th victory day of Bangladesh

Eminent singer Qaderi Kibria performing at the program to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore

Members of Embassy family performing at the Ekushey program
H.E. Akramul Qader with the former peace corps volunteers who worked in Bangladesh.

Mr. Peter Blood, son of late US Consul General in Dhaka during 1971 speaking at the victory day celebration.

Ambassador Robert O Blake, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia, US Department of State speaking at the National Day Reception.

Dr. Alyssa Ayres, Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia Bureau, US Department of State speaking on the occasion of the International Mother Language Day.

Mehendi, decoration of hands, at the Embassy open house program.

Audience enjoying the Pohela Boishakh Program at the Embassy.
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<tr>
<td>$2001.00 &amp; Above</td>
<td>$8.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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