

ICE TODAY BRANDING BANGLADESH CONCLAVE 2006

ICE TODAY BRANDING BANGLADESH CONCLAVE 2006: A NOTE FROM THE ICE EDITORIAL TEAM

In our digitalized postmodern world a country's 'image' is more important than ever. It plays a crucial role in its international dealings, often decisively influencing the stance other countries adopt towards it. To put things in a frankly pragmatic perspective, the better a country's image, the better the deal it gets in the global marketplace. The ICE Today Branding Bangladesh Conclave 2006 aims to bring some of the best minds in the country to discuss and debate the problems relating to its image and to determine the best way to brand it.

The day-long conclave, to be held on Sunday 27th August 2006, at Lohori, Radisson Water Garden Hotel, Dhaka will recommend strategies for this ambitious exercise in 'Branding Bangladesh', in the hope that it will eventually impact positively on the country's image in the global community. Needless to say, a country's total image is a composite of what it presents to the outside world and of its self-image, and the latter will call for particularly sensitive analysis.

All Bangladeshis are well aware that they themselves are the most relentless critics. We slander ourselves, make up cruel jokes with ourselves as the butt, obsessively project a dismal view of our own future. Indulging in such acts of self-laceration might even be

described as a national pastime. However, this kind of collective masochism is also something we would like to keep to ourselves.

Should foreigners venture any stringent criticism of our country or show the slightest hint of prejudice towards us, we are swift to voice our indignation. We might even take to the streets in protest. A common rhetorical strategy we employ in our defense is to point out the iniquity of country "X" criticizing us when they are guilty of 'n' number of crimes against humanity. But among ourselves we may unstintingly concede the validity of the criticism leveled at us.

In terms of social psychology this is no doubt a pathological phenomenon; our behaviour smacks of a schizoid syndrome. But it shouldn't really surprise anyone. Indeed such a syndrome is common whenever and wherever a community or society becomes disadvantaged or anemic, for whatever reason.

At the root of our negative self-image lies a fundamental sense of failure. The Bangladesh independence movement was fuelled by idealistic faith in our ability to build a healthy and prosperous nation. Our history to date shows that we have not been able to fully realize our dreams. But is it because our initial confidence was unrealistic? Or is it that we have made mistakes that could

have been avoided and that perhaps can still be rectified? A lot depends on how we answer these questions.

As for the outside world's view of us, we are all aware of its unmitigated bleakness. Accidents and natural disasters, political cataclysms and social unrest, insurgency, terrorist activities, economic backwardness, rampant corruption -- these are the ingredients that make up our image abroad. No one will deny that these are absent in our country or that it is of paramount importance to address these issues. But most will also agree that the absence of anything positive in the picture makes it an unfair and inaccurate representation.

Many seminars and workshops have been held already that have discussed the country's image, highlighting the substantive issues that affect it -- issues relating to governance, human rights law and order, gender, economic development, etc. etc. -- and have tried to throw light on these issues. We, for our part, would like to put the accent on areas more responsive to creative intervention by the corporate world, NGOs and other Civil Society organizations -- areas like the arts and cultural activities of all sorts. ICE Today, its sister publications (*Jamini* and *Kali O Kalam*), and its parent organization, the Bengal Foundation, have a special

interest in putting a cultural slant on the deliberations on the country's image.

To give a concrete impression of what we are getting at, we could draw your attention to our artists, writers, musicians, among whom there are many who could be great assets to brand the country. We could become widely known as, say 'The Land of Lalou', rather than the land of floods and famine. The idea is to associate our country with positive aspects of our culture and these, hopefully will inspire us to do better in our various activities. It is also worth pointing out that the positive things we are mentioning are there already, so let us make the most of them and build a positive Bangladesh.

Members of the ICE Today Editorial Board

Fakrul Alam
Kaiser Haq
Syed Manzoarul Islam
Luva N Choudhury, Editor
Ziaul Karim, Executive Editor

IN SEARCH OF ANOTHER 'BRAND' FOR BANGLADESH

By DEBAPRIYA BHATTACHARYA

ADDRESSING PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES

Novelist Arnold Bennett (1861-1931) once made the point that 'it is difficult to make a reputation, but it is even more difficult to mar a reputation once properly made - so faithful is the public.' Bangladesh, regrettably, faces a reputation challenge which is popularly known as its 'image problem'. Thus we observe that the country is being regularly ranked at the low end by organisations as diverse as the World Economic Forum, UNDP, UNCTAD, Transparency International, Freedom House, and Goldman & Sachs. These rankings are usually based on a mix of objective measures and stakeholder perceptions.

The fundamental prerequisite for changing perceptions about Bangladesh would be to change the unfavorable realities prevailing in the country. However, improvement of the reality needs to be supplemented by an effective communication strategy which will adequately project the primary strengths of the country to the world at large. Indeed, the concept of 'branding' may be effectively utilised to address both the reality and perception challenges which Bangladesh is currently confronting.

THE CONCEPT OF NATION BRANDING

The concept of nation branding was elaborated by Simon Anholt in 1998 through his article 'Nation Brands of the 21st Century' in the *Journal of Brand Management* where he pointed out that 'brands create a value that is invisible'. Anholt, a market researcher from the corporate sector, reckons that a brand is a 'multiplier of value and as such represents a substantial advantage for its owner; it is as good as money in the bank.'

It is said that a country cannot be sold like a toothpaste. Thus, nation branding is not about pretending that everything is fine in a country, nor is it about discouraging investors and tourists from coming into the country. It is about letting others know about the talents and the opportunities that a country is endowed with. Accordingly, nation branding requires a broader definition of the term 'branding' that includes a plan for earning a favourable reputation. Indeed, one needs to inspire and induce the majority of the citizens to act in a way that helps the country to earn such a reputation and make sure that the world knows about it and believes in it.

Anholt introduced in 2005 the *Anholt-GMI Nation Brand Index* along with GMI, an e-business solution provider. Based on

responses from about 25,900 consumers drawn from 35 countries, the index provided a score addressing six core areas of a country depicted through a hexagon: *Tourism, Culture, Governance, Exports, People and Investment*. The top 10 countries (in descending order) were: UK, Switzerland, Canada, Italy, Sweden, Germany, Japan, France, Australia and USA.

BRANDING BANGLADESH

Nation branding is not yet given much attention in the middle and low income countries. But if a country opts not to have a branding strategy, it does not mean that others will leave it alone. Rather, disadvantaged countries like Bangladesh will be left to the discretion of others and get 'branded' based on limited and partial or biased information. Remaining cognisant of this, emerging economies are increasingly addressing the issue of nation branding in a proactive manner. For instance, in the region, India is recreating its image as the hub of IT based industries and services as well as a major source of skilled manpower. Even small countries, like Bhutan, may use their image of being small, unique, unspoiled and fragile that is envied by the developed world. Till date, the *Anholt Index* does not include Bangladesh. But as

Bangladesh progresses, it will definitely generate enhanced interest in the global community and the sponsors of the index will be inclined to include the country in its exercise. In this connection, a limited survey carried out by CPD among a set of young professionals ranked the six core areas of brand reputation in the following descending order of strength: *People, Exports, Culture, Tourism, Investment and Governance*. Incidentally, the numerical distance of the weakest area (governance) from the rest was considerable. One wonders whether the expatriate consumers will agree with this ordering.

Bangladesh will be well advised to develop a branding strategy which would expose convincingly and continuously, its natural and acquired strengths, without underplaying the need to effectively deal with the structural and policy weaknesses. A government-corporate partnership, underpinned by active involvement of the civil society, may be forged to articulate an operational plan in this regard.

Debapriya Bhattacharya is Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

MESSAGES FROM THE SUPPORT PARTNERS

In this era of globalisation when the countries of the world are no longer limited by the geographical boundaries, it is equally important for a country to portray its image not only to its citizens but also in the global arena.

Global recognition will help a country to gain numerous advantages which it can use for its development. Bangladesh is a country of tremendous potential and significant achievements. And no doubt 'Branding Bangladesh' is a brilliant effort to establish that landmark in the global spectrum.

Already the talent and efforts of young Bangladeshi professionals in telecommunications have set global standards. And thus Bangladesh has become one of the fastest growing telecommunications markets in the world. Being the fastest growing mobile operator in the world for 2005, banglalink™'s own phenomenal journey of the last eighteen months is also a glowing testament to the dynamism and growth potential of this country.

It gives us great pleasure to be associated with the Branding Bangladesh Conclave 2006. ICE Today's commendable initiative with all the leading minds of Bangladesh to focus and highlight issues related to the improvement of Bangladesh's global image.

We wish the event every success.

Rashid Khan, CEO
banglalink



Image has always been an issue in getting things to move forward and that today has appeared for Bangladesh as a pertinent factor in its drive to achieve global exposure. The national image should have been a factor amplifying our positive aspects to the global arena; unfortunately, however, in reality this has turned to be the most critical limiting factor for Bangladesh. In this context, ICE Today has been remarkably pragmatic in organising the conclave on 'Branding Bangladesh'. My heartiest felicitations to them for this great initiative and I wish the venture all success.

With our rich cultural treasures, enormous agro and marine resources blended with a marvellous pool of human resources, we have so many things to offer to the world! The pity is that the world is not at all aware of our good things and what is publicised about Bangladesh is mostly what we are not. Unless rightly supported by the government, noble initiatives like the one taken by ICE Today will not yield the desired outcome. I would expect that one of the objectives of this round table meeting will be to provide an input to the elaboration of a branding Bangladesh strategy by the Government of Bangladesh.

Md. Nasser Shahrear Zahede, Advisor
Roche Bangladesh Limited



I have been in Bangladesh since 2001 and there is hardly any place in the country where I have not visited during 5 years or so and have literally measured the length and breadth of the country i.e., Tetulia to Teknaf. I had the opportunity to mix with all kind of people at large in general and particularly people belonging to the business community. Bangladesh is the most densely populated country in the world, and this population may turn into a force of potential importance to the total economy. I have full faith in the people of Bangladesh because of their ability, strength, courage and willingness. I have no hesitation in declaring that one day, Bangladesh will surely soar as one of the strongest economies in the region. Solving the country's main problem, poverty, is not a tough issue. I fully endorse the view of Professor Muhammad Yunus that people are poor because they have no financial structures to help them. Poverty is a structural problem, not a personal problem.

I am really fascinated by the beautiful countryside and many archeological and historical sites of the country. In some countries tourism is the highest foreign exchange earning sector and also the main source of employment. I strongly believe that Bangladesh will be able to attain a similar record if proper measures are taken to improve the tourism industry.

P N Iyer, Managing Director
Holcim (Bangladesh) Ltd



What is the image of Bangladesh. What 'branding' does Bangladesh have? As a company that focuses on being an international service provider, we spend a considerable amount of time defining our brand, or what is our image. We also ensure then that this brand or image is controlled to maintain consistency.

How does this relate to the 'Image' or 'Brand' of a country? Many would argue that the country's branding is often due to the regular news reports that portray Bangladesh as a nation cursed with poverty, natural disasters, corruption and political turmoil. As a foreign national working in Bangladesh, I believe this is not a fair picture of Bangladesh, and in particular it does not reflect the true qualities of the Bangladeshi people. So it is high time that we should work together to project the real positive image of the country. Bangladesh does have challenges like almost all nations in the world but I believe the potentiality is enormous and this potentiality has not been exposed to the international community the way it was supposed to be.

The very thought of discovering Bangladesh afresh with a proper image presented before the international community is an excellent idea. In fact, Bangladesh should have developed a positive image for itself a long while ago for the simple fact that it has no shortage of necessary features to create a unique image of the country.

I congratulate the organisers of the 'ICE Today Branding Bangladesh 2006 Conclave' for hosting an event like this. This is a timely effort and we feel proud to be the hospitality partner of this event.

Ian R Barrow, General Manager
Radisson Water Garden Hotel



Image. It is a very important equity for a nation striving for development. How we can promote it, is a big question in every mind. 'ICE Today Branding Bangladesh Conclave-2006' is a timely meet where a lot of ideas and strategies will be generated.

The country is ours, so the responsibility is also ours. Everyone should participate and come forward to enhance the image of the country. Hopefully, the outcome of the Conclave will put forward a vision for Bangladesh 2021.

Globalisation has brought with it newer challenges before us and we have to prepare ourselves for that. Now it is time to attract world attention towards our art and culture and all the positives that we have through the centuries.

Unitrend is proud to be associated with the Conclave as its creative partner.

I wish every success to the ICE Today Branding Bangladesh Conclave 2006.

Muneer Ahmed Khan, Chairman and Creative Chief
Unitrend



LIST OF THE PARTICIPANTS

- Moderator:
Kaiser Haq
Professor of English, Dhaka University
and Member, Editorial Board, ICE Today and Jamini
1. Aly Zaker
MD and CEO of Asiatic
 2. Amir Khasru Mahmud Choudhury
Chairman of Hotel Sarina
 3. Anisuzzaman
Chairman of the Jamini Editorial Board
 4. Annisul Huq
Chairman, Mohammadi Group
 5. Ata Safdar
MD of Reokitt Benckiser
 6. Atiur Rahman
Economist
 7. Azizul Haq
MD of GlaxoSmithKline, Bangladesh
 8. Bibi Russell
fashion designer
 9. Debapriya Bhattacharya
Executive Director of CPD
 10. Dina Siddiqi

- Research Associate, University of Pennsylvania
11. Fakrul Alam
Professor of English, Dhaka University
and Member, Editorial Board, ICE Today and Jamini
 12. Farooq Sobhan
former Foreign Secretary
 13. Firdaus Azim
Chairperson of English Dept, BRAC University
 14. Forkan Bin Quasem
Secretary General of BASIS
 15. Hanif Zakaria
Area Manager of Emirates, Bangladesh
 16. Ian R Barrow
GM of Radisson
 17. Imran Rahman
MD & CEO of BRAC Bank
 18. Israrul Huq
Executive Director of Channel I
 19. K. Mahmood Sattar
MD & CEO of Eastern Bank
 20. Khushi Kabir
women's rights activist
 21. Luna Shamsuddoha
Chairman of Dohatec

22. Mahboob Jamil
Chairman of Singer, Bangladesh
23. Mahfuz Anam
Editor of The Daily Star
24. Mamun Rashid
CEO of Citibank NA
25. Md. Nasser Shahrear Zahede
Advisor to Roche, Bangladesh
26. Mohammad Mohsin
MD of PHP Group
27. Motiur Rahman
Editor of daily Prothom Alo
28. Muneer Ahmed Khan
Chairman and Creative Head of Unitrend Ltd.
29. Murtaja Baseer
Artist
30. Omar Rashid
Director of Marketing, Banglalink
31. P. N. Iyer
MD of Holcim
32. Ramendu Majumder
MD of Expressions
33. Rumi Saifullah
President of JCI

34. Saber Hossain Chowdhury
Advisor to the opposition leader Sheikh Hasina
 35. Salma Shafi
MD of Shelltech Consultants
 36. Sayeeful Islam
Past president of DCCI
 37. Shireen Huq
Women's rights activist
 38. Wahiduddin Mahmud
Professor of Economics, DU
 39. Wali Bhuiyan
MD of BOC
 40. Yves Marre
Advisor to Friendship Floating Hospital
 41. Abul Khair
Chairman of Bengal Group and Publisher of ICE Today,
Jamini and Kali O Kalam
 42. Luva N Choudhury
Editor of ICE Today and Jamini
 43. Ziaul Karim
Executive Editor of ICE Today and Jamini
- Coordinator:
Aftab Mahmud Khurshid
Director Marketing and Business, JCI