

Wealth Creation

The economic management record of the present government well beyond the half-way mark of the 1996-97 fiscal year is becoming a subject-matter of considerable private sector evaluation. FBCI chief Yussuf Abdullah Harun has, in an interaction the other day with the Economic Reporters' Forum, drawn our attention to an alarming increase of government borrowing from the banking sector — to the tune of Tk 10 billion in the last eight months. When this is read with the predicted 10 per cent salary hike in the government sector which works out to Tk 8-10 billion in gross amount we have a total of Tk 2000 crore fiscal deficit staring us in the face.

The private sector has reasons to feel cornered. With the government having to bank-roll its deficits on such a massive scale, not much of banking resource will be left for credit distribution in the private sector. The liquidity squeeze will tighten on the private sector's wind-pipe, so to speak. And to make matters worse for this sector it will be forced to effect salary raises of its own as an inevitable consequence of pay-hikes in the government sector.

The topicality of the deficit management issue has caught on with the government and expert circles, too, as is evidenced by the fact that the finance ministry in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank held a workshop on Monday on "growth and macroeconomic stability", which zeroed in on the subject of deficits. The pointed suggestion to emerge from the workshop was that the government ought to keep a leash on fiscal deficits in order that a stable macroeconomic environment can be maintained.

Generation of new wealth is central to any strategy for an economic take-off. But how is wealth to be generated when: a) as little as 14 per cent revenue comes from direct tax and only 0.5 million people are in the tax-net; b) the rate of implementation of the ADP 1996-97 is as gingerly as only 32 per cent; and c) though eight months of the year have gone by; and despite Tk 62.73 billion being invested in the power sector between 1990 and 1995 we have an electric supply shortfall of 500 MW caused largely by poor plant maintenance and theft or systems loss.

The priorities are self-explanatory. Actions are needed now, actions such as not the so-called "special measures" that seem rather truncated but action-responsive to ground realities. Economy is a matrix of so many variables that the government cannot plough a lonely furrow there. It has to secure the cooperation of the Opposition, the bureaucrats and the business people to be able to perform.

Dhaka-Hanoi Relations

Vietnam and Bangladesh have so far been drawn to each other more by a cultural affinity than by economic interests. Yet their geographical proximity did not quite rule out a mutually beneficial economic cooperation. So, the setting up of a joint commission during Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet's visit to Dhaka for economic, cultural, scientific and technological cooperation between the two countries has been a right step towards realising the full potential of their collaboration. Both sides have also agreed in principle to have an annual forum where a yearly review of the whole gamut of their bilateral relations will take place for the sake of broad-based and meaningful cooperation.

The other two agreements are more specific in nature having to do with cultural cooperation and exchange of information. There is also the accord between private sectors of the two countries. Both countries may find in each other a competitor when it comes to attracting foreign investment, but a trade agreement signed between Dhaka and Hanoi during the visit of the Bangladesh's commerce and industries minister to Vietnam earlier on has been a trail-blazer in economic cooperation. The two countries are almost at the same level of industrial development and aspire after rapid industrialisation. Meaningful cooperation can be forged by allowing each other's commodities an easy access to the respective markets. A stiff competition in inviting foreign investment can also be avoided through consultation and understanding at the proposed annual forum.

This done, the two countries will then be required to identify the areas where each has an edge over the other or complementarities with the other. One area seems to have already been identified. It is the information sector where we may have a slight edge over Vietnam. Similarly, Vietnam holds a sway over attracting foreign investment. Certainly, identification of such areas and learning from each other's experience will count at the end of the day. In a global village that is what the two nations can expect of each other.

Piracy Threat

Piracy is on the rise in and around the Sunderbans, according to a report carried in a Bangla daily. During the past eight months, no less than 50 incidents of dacoity and hostage-taking have been reported from there. The air is so fraught with fear of the treacherous swoops that fishermen, loggers and collectors of honey or *gol pata* are losing their interest in their occupations.

The pirates have virtually thrown an open challenge to the law enforcing men. In the most pirate-infested forest range, Sathkhira, there are two river police encampments. Normally these should be enough but the irony is that neither do the bases have any modern and fast-moving water vessels nor enough men to chase the pirates even after receiving advance information about them. So, the pirates, armed with sophisticated weapons, are thriving on the lack of administrative measures.

If the piracy threat would have left the Sunderbans undisturbed for some time, it might have been a bonus of sorts. But two other news items concerning the killing of tigers and deer by poachers in collusion with a section of employees of the forest department present a different picture. They make one suspicious of a mutually working understanding between the poachers and the pirates. Clearly, it is a SOS call from our world famous mangroves. Let the government tighten the vigil there.

Humanising the Police Station

Today in major urban areas, the average manpower strength of the PS is about 150 man whereas the average annual crime rate is about 300. The population having increased many hundreds of times in many urban areas since 1900, it far exceeds the capability of the PS staff to handle crime.

CRIME control and maintenance of peace is primarily the responsibility of the State, at the very basic level the Police Station (Thana) fulfils this requirement. An ordinary citizen seeking redress of a grievance of a criminal, quasi-criminal or even civil nature has to go to this basic unit of the law enforcement agencies (LEAs). Traditionally the personnel of the PS uphold the rule of law in their area of jurisdiction by patrolling the area and inquiring into alleged misdemeanors. Information about those living in the area is extremely necessary, criminal records of known or likely criminals are maintained in the PS. The knowledge of radical groups, ethnic, religious, student activists, etc., is of vital importance.

The organisation of today's PS is still synchronised to imperial times, in effect in the rural areas. Till late in the British rule only Calcutta, Madras and Bombay had Metropolitan Police, the rest of the towns and cities were under the cover of rural-oriented law enforcement practices. For Pakistan's many cities and towns, the rural version of the 19th century continues to be in use, there is need for radical reform in keeping with the times. The ground realities resulting from escalation in the level and volume of crime have been totally ignored. To give one example — in 1902 the British laid down that each Police Station would get a "permanent advance" (petty cash as we know it) of Rs. 10 which was then the equivalent of one tola of gold, how much does that Rs. 10 purchase today? Other than the salaries of the police personnel PS, the Station House Officer (SHO) looks to manage affairs in the PS through "voluntary contributions" from the citizenry. Faced by the threat of constant shakedown, the citizens look at the PS as an "object (or house) of fear" to be avoided at all costs. The *Muharrir*, in effect an As-

sistant to the SHO, helps him to manage today's PS. The organisation worked very well when the manpower and crime of the PS was manageable, i.e. 10 men to handle an average of 100 crimes a year. Today in major urban areas, the average manpower strength of the PS is about 150 man whereas the average annual crime rate is about 300. The population having increased many hundreds of times in many urban areas since 1900, it far exceeds the capability of the PS staff to handle crime. With organised crime, terrorism, ethnic tension, juvenile delinquency, etc. thrown in the melting pot, it is a wonder that the existing structure has not broken down completely.

When a citizen builds up the courage to go to the PS to record his (or her) grievance, the Police officers on duty are not only reluctant to record the grievance but tend to treat the complainant as an accused.

Their conduct being intimidating, it is almost impossible for women to take this risk! The law and the police rules necessitate logging of every information in the Station Diary (SD), which is today mostly in the hands of an unauthorised person, a constable, according to common prevalent practices. Before condemning the Police for being corrupt, inefficient and negligent of their duty, we have to be fair and acknowledge that the PS does not have 1) a proper organisation and management, 2) enough funds, 3) proper information, 4) proper mechanism for quick redress of grievances, 5) citizen-police liaison to remove citizen's distrust of the PS and its staff, and 6) availability of dispensation of justice at the basic level. Radical measures have to be taken at the grassroots level of social interaction to create trust in the

mind of the citizens and thus take the first step in making the police effective at the grassroots level of the social structure. The PS needs to have an Operational Management Division headed by the SHO and a Human Resources Division headed by a Special Magistrate (housed in an Annex to the PS). An Administrative Officer under the SHO must ensure administrative support to both the Divisions.

The Operational Management Division would be the original law enforcement team but reorganised on a more focused basis to have: (1) Information Section (2) Criminal

ing in the area (1) recording all complaints/grievances in the Station Diary (2) proper blow-up maps which can pinpoint every structure in the area (3) record of known and/or suspected criminals (4) forensic section with capability of finger prints, photos of scene of crime (5) record of ethnic, religious and radical elements, etc and (6) maintain liaison with adjacent PS, etc.

The Criminal Investigation Section should be headed by an Inspector and have at least 9-10 teams each headed by an SI/ASI, which will carry out duties with respect to (1) matters relating to crime (2) matters re-

lating to criminals (3) back-up to the Beat Patrol (4) investigations (5) prosecution and (6) analysis of pattern of crime. The Patrolling Section should be headed by an SI. Their duties are to (1) carry out Beat Patrol (2) liaison with public in the field and (3) check out particulars of every household/business concern. The Security Section should be headed by an SI/ASI and will do intelligence gathering with respect to (1) various radical groups (2) labour and student groups active in political militancy.

The Crime Prevention Section will be headed by an SI and have male/female personnel of better education to look after (1) females and juveniles in two different units. The female unit will deal with family disputes or family problems in close li-

Liaison Committee (CPLC) and have four sub-sections viz (a) Public Relations to be headed by a volunteers appointed by the District CPLC, one such PR volunteer at all times present on the premises (b) Arbitration Cell to be composed of a volunteer senior citizens of the area to act as Arbitrators in matters of dispute so that matters are settled out of court. Arbitrators should be appointed by the Judiciary in consultation with local administration (c) Legal Aid to be composed of partly-paid volunteers, at least one being present at all times to provide legal aid relief to the uneducated or those who cannot afford legal help (d) Medical Aid can be optional, to be composed of partly-paid volunteers from the medical profession having requisite first aid equipment and medicines, at least one Doctor at all times on the premises along with an ambulance.

They can also help in medical emergencies in the area i.e. evacuation of affected people to concerned hospitals. To make this experimental model successful, some PS in the urban area should be made models for adoption. Changes will have to be made in line with the experience gained as the experiment progresses. The police personnel should not be changed, they should be made to do their job, effective monitoring can be provided "on the job" by the Human Resources Division. The idea is to humanise the PS, to convert it from a den of fear to an oasis of peace for the citizenry of the area.

(The writer acknowledges with gratitude the advice and help given by Mr. Asad Jahangir Khan, Additional IG Police, Sirah with respect to the Police portion (Operational Management Division) and the publication on "Human Rights by the Judiciary" edited by Mr. Zakauallah, Registrar of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, which helped to formulate the idea of the "Human Resources Division").

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

Investigation Section (3) Patrolling Section (4) Security Section (5) Crime Prevention Section and (6) Administration Section. The Human Resources Division would have a (1) Judiciary Section (2) Citizen Police Liaison Committee (CPLC) which will have four sub-sections, namely (a) Public Relations (b) Arbitration (c) Legal Aid (volunteers) (d) Medical Aid.

The Operational Management Division should be headed by an SHO whose rank should be not less than that of DSP in the Army, a company of 150 men is commanded by a Major, his company officer is supposed to be a Captain. Important PS should invariably have Superintendents of Police (SP) as Heads. Duties should be shared by the (1) Information Section having computers with relevant information of all citizens liv-

ing our book marketing culture? And has any — to repeat, any — of Hailey's books failed to hit the bookstore and turn out to be a bestseller?

Right now I have, on my table, a copy of the 4th issue of The Minerva Book of Short Stories series. First published as Best Short Stories 1991, the 304-page paperback, containing twenty-five stories, cost me only Tk. 225. The book, a Mandarin Paperbacks (London) venture, was bought by me from a book shop at the Aziz Supermarket about a month back.

How much would a Bangladeshi book of the same size and — let us assume — of a comparable value cost? If higher, where lies the almighty?

Of Our Ailing Book Market

by Fazlul Kabir

Writing, as a commercially profitable pursuit, remains some two or three persons' preserves and the rest are, as it were, tramps in the wilderness.

THE Ekushey Book Fair is on and by the time this piece will come out in print, will be in its prime. To all appearances, the 550-stall gala is moving, through routine bouts of ups and downs, to a happy finale from all pertinent points of view including the commercial.

To be candid, besides the sentimental aspect, commercial angle is also cardinal in any exercise that, other things apart, involves money. While, going by previous records, Bangla Academy, one of the two organising agencies (Book Publishers and Printers Association being the other), may have, as usual, only partly scooped up its stakes from the fees charged for stalls, the stall-owners, particularly those owning bookstalls, will mostly keep their fingers crossed till the last day. Until that day there will be no knowing for them exactly on what side of the profit-and-loss fence they stand.

Investment in publication is yet to be much of a paying venture in our country. Few investments are as highly dicey as those in the book business, investors turning into virtual paupers not being uncommon events. While books, published annually, can be counted on fingertips, those, selling well and fetching tolerable returns, number still smaller — almost a microscopic few.

Writing, as a commercially profitable pursuit, remains some two or three persons' preserves and the rest are, as it were, tramps in the wilderness.

As yet, there are reportedly only three or four who could afford penning as a means of livelihood. The underdogs do not number many either. The

core fact is that writing is still viewed as a half-hearted pastime — something tinkerable that, if at all to be indulged in, is to be tinkered with once in a while and, then, forgotten clean. The result is glaring in its overall quality. Masterpieces are a rarity in our literature.

Our bestsellers present no heart-warming picture either. Sale of a paltry five thousand copies in the first edition is all that makes a book the year's bestseller. That is about fiction. When it comes to poetry, the situation is all the more dismal. Publishers loath even to go that far and are said to embark upon no more than five hundred copies at one go — be the book by the country's top-ranking poet.

In fact, quantitatively speaking, our bestsellers are only so-called. They are bestsellers merely to the extent of being pygmies in a world of lilliputians. Compared with those of even West Bengal, they fall short — far, if not of all, at least of those by Shankar, all of whose books run into several editions in a matter of mere months.

Far more striking is the scenario in the western world. Some hundred thousand copies of what turns out to be a best-seller getting exhausted in a week's time is but a normal phenomenon there. Physicians with roaring practices being accidentally pushed into writing stints and eventually hanging up their stethoscopes against the wall for good are not an un-

common story in the western literary world. For some of them, penmanship was so instant a success that once they had worn the writer's plume, they had not to look back at their professional kits. Dr A J Cronin's 'Hatter's Castle' was one such venture. Millions of its copies were sold in a few years' time.

And, of the writers emerging from the glamour enclave, this is unexceptionally true. It is only recent — barely three months old — news that 400,000 copies of something of memoirs, written by Brigitte Bardot, 63-year-old one-time French queen of Hollywood's tinsel world, got sold in about a week. Do the Francophones outnumber the Bengalees? An embarrassing question indeed!

Our lamentably limited book market is simply incompatible with the fact we are the lone nation in history to have shed blood for the mother tongue.

Incidentally, how much unjustified is our readers' plaint that prices of their quarries in the book market are prohibitive enough to be mostly off-limits for them? Not much. I am inclined to think, as I browse through the 14-page list of the books, marketed in the last November-December Boi Mela organised by the Jatiyo Grantha Kendro. What may well be called a 64-page booklet carries, for instance, a 40-taka price tag, each page thus costing more than sixty paisa. Indis-

putably high cost of production notwithstanding, such an exorbitant price, can, by no means, be fairly claimed to be in right proportion to all that goes into the book's making, plus the writer's royalty and the publisher's margin.

To me, tomes should either not be written in Bangladesh or, if written at all by reason of the plot's dimensions, should be marketed in paperbacks so as to ensure their availability at the minimum possible price. Why

our publishers go for hardbacks is beyond me. To prevent pages from falling off? To render the books eye-catching? To allow for maximum possible glossy touches? That all these pre-emptive wrongs has long been amply proved by the western world publishers. If, say, a 500-page novel by Arthur Hailey can be marketed in paperback without a single page slipping off during the unpeeped courses of handling, what stops cheap paperbacks from enter-

OPINION

Yet Another Look at the 1996 Ganges Water Agreement

Engr M A Matin

Recently while going through The Daily Star, I read with interest the statement of Professor M Maniruzzaman Miah in an article (7/2/97). In the said article he says, "The more I look at the treaty however the more I am convinced that I have got a very raw deal..." I was also amused in realizing why in the morning of 1st January people were rushing to the Ganges bank to see the promised water rolling down.

For about a week, a vast number of people including politicians rushed to the Hardinge Bridge site to see the promised water. The press was really over publicizing the Water Agreement so much so that the general masses were really fooled and the Ministry hurriedly through a TV programme had to clarify the position. In that TV programme, in reply to a question, Dr Nishat said, "We shall continue to see the sandy chars in the Ganges bed." After all, we have to remember that 50 per cent of the dry season flow of the Ganges are being diverted.

Even now I come across newspapers talking in terms of 35,000 cusecs guaranteed flow. This is a wrong interpretation of provision of the agreement. The truth is that during March to May for the ten day periods of Mar (21-31), Apr (11-20) and May (1-10) Bangladesh will get less than 35,000 cusecs. The lowest will be 27633 cusecs during Apr (11-20) based on average flow and as such on an average Bangladesh will get flow less than even 27633 cusecs every alternate year during this ten-day period.

Coming back to Professor M Maniruzzaman Miah's contention, I would like to say that there will not be much of a difference by taking average or 50 per cent dependable flow. In fact, in normal probability distribution or its variation used in stream flow analysis, average, median and mode are used in defining the distribution and significant difference is realised only for high return periods. Since flow as available at Farakka is shared, average or 50 per cent dependable flow is not making any difference in certainty or otherwise.

Use of 75 per cent dependable flow in 1977 agreement schedule or average flow in 1996 agreement schedule will not make the difference. Actual difference comes from the sharing which about 10 per cent less water in the 1996 agreement. By switching over to average flow from the existing practice of 75 per cent depend-

able flow, surely some confusion has been created and to common people it will seem as if we are getting more water under 1996 agreement which is not true. The easiest way for a comparison of 1977 and 1996 agreement is to convert India's and Bangladesh's shares of 1977 agreement as per cent of flow at Farakka and use this percentage to recompute the two shares in 1996 agreement.

I would not like to agree with Professor Maniruzzaman Miah that the stipulation in Article-II of the treaty that "every effort would be made by the upper riparian to protect flows of water at Farakka as in the 40 years average availability" is at best a statement of pious wish of a particular government. Rather I consider this as a very important provision of the present agreement and has reflected the concern of Bangladesh and possibly of West Bengal over the dwindling flow of the Ganges reaching Farakka. Through this stipulation the two sovereign countries have recognised the necessity of maintaining the present flow regime of the Ganges at Farakka and responsibility of this has been identified with the upper riparian.

I would like to differ with Professor M Maniruzzaman Miah that the weakest point of the treaty is the absence of any provision for augmentation of the dry season Ganges flow for the growing needs of the two countries. Article-VIII clearly recognises the importance of cooperation of the two Governments for the long term augmentation. In the past when it was realised that the question of augmentation of the dry season flow of the Ganges was complicating and delaying the people of Bangladesh had a general feeling that the two issues could be separated and a long term sharing could be immediately implemented to avoid or to reduce further damage to the ecology and economics of Bangladesh. I think the present agreement is a good reflection of this feeling.

I however recognise that the following are a few weak points of the agreement: The present agreement has brought less water for Bangladesh. Under the agreement during the driest period (March-May) Bangladesh will be getting about 10 per cent less water in comparison to 1977 and considered 10-day wise this reduction will be up to 18.5 per cent during April (11-20).

India the upper riparian will make all out effort to maintain 1 last 40 years (1949-88) average flow. This is a major breakthrough in obtaining a long term assurance on the Bangladesh share of Ganges water. This provision should be hailed by us all.

In Section 3 under Article-II it is stipulated that in the event of Ganges flow going down below 50,000 cusecs the two Governments will urgently sit for reconciliation... Why this provision? During the prediversion period of 1948-73 at the Hardinge Bridge location, the Ganges flow went below 50,000 cusecs on two occasions. Is it apprehended that the Farakka flow will now go under 50,000 cusecs more frequently? In that case shouldn't India make an all out effort (as per provision of Section-2 of Article-II) to maintain the 1948-88 flow regime?

In the event of review under Article-II section 10 and 11, if a reconciliation agreement cannot be signed then as if as a measure of punishment Bangladesh share will be reduced by 10 per cent. Is it not very unfair? Thus we have already lost 10 per cent of share in comparison to the 1977 agreement and there is a threat of further reduction by another 10 per cent.

I also recognise the following as very strong points of the agreement:

After a gap of eight years the country has received another Ganges water agreement. So the people along the Ganges bank in Bangladesh will have a sign of relief from the uncertainty of dry season Ganges flow. Further ecological and economic damages in the Ganges service area will at least be partially reduced.

The agreement is for a period of 30 years. This is the first time that Bangladesh has been able to obtain a fairly medium-term agreement on Ganges water. Bangladesh can now go ahead in formulating and implementing water development projects in Ganges service area with confidence.

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Water sharing of 1996 has caught the attention of the whole nation. Many people are eager to know what is happening and whether we are getting fair or as per agreement? In order to remove misgivings of wrong assumptions it will be good if weekly bulletins are issued on the flows and releases at Farakka and the flows at Hardinge Bridge.

To the Editor...

"The girl child"

Sir, Farida Akhter ("The Girl Child" and the Garment Worker are in Danger", Daily Star, March 8) tells us that, despite the widespread publicity given to the Yasmeen and Seema cases, she has "not seen not seen any response from any international quarter in this regard."

Save the children (UK) regards the appalling vulnerability of poor female children in Bangladesh to be one of the most crucial issues facing the country today. It seems to us that nearly all progress and development in the country must be doomed to fail while such abuses against young girls are widely considered more or less acceptable. We are deeply interested in working to find and support ways by which Bangladeshi women and children can protect themselves from such perils — and by which Bangladesh can protect itself from this prevalent cancer.

Simon Mollison
Programme director
SCF (UK), Bangladesh

Wanted — Tajuddin's photo

Sir, Due to Pakistani discrimination and repression on the people of its then eastern wing, it was Maolana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani who realized first that the repressed people must have freedom from the colonial rulers. Therefore, we are to regard Maolana Bhasani as the dreamer of our national independence. Besides, he was the founding father of the Awami Muslim League

(1949) of which Sheikh Mujib was the first joint secretary. But Sheikh Mujib was an efficient organizer and organized the movement against the Pakistani colonialism. He was unfortunately arrested in 1971 just before our armed struggle began. So Sheikh Mujib could not lead the Liberation War by his physical presence. It was Tajuddin Ahmed who led the armed struggle successfully. Therefore, while we regard Sheikh Mujib as the undoubted founder of the independent Bangladesh, we are to respect Tajuddin Ahmed as the executor of our liberation.

During the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of our victory, I searched every nook and corner of the Victory Fair in Dhaka for a photo of Tajuddin alone or of the four national leaders together, but failed. There were at least six types of Sheikh Mujib's photos, 10 types of Sheikh Hasina's, might be the same number of Khaleda Zia's and of a number of others.

Then why should not we blame our forgetfulness and ungratefulness? Sheikh Mujib might erroneously weigh Tajuddin (Tajuddin was dropped from the cabinet just before the recognition from the USA), but can we? We saw how Tajuddin was killed with other three national leaders in jails, believably, because of not joining the illegal Mushataque government. Had Tajuddin prevailed in the presence, it was August 1975, conspiracy would have been followed, at least I think so. However, would anybody help me to have a photo of revered Tajuddin?

M A S Molla
Foundation Trainee
NAEM, Dhaka

A classic tribute to a master orator

Sir, Mr Mahfuz Anam's article "Bangabandhu's Finest Hour" published in The Daily Star on March 7 was a masterpiece, a classic tribute to a master orator of this century — Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The write-up was superbly balanced between sublime emotion and down-to-earth realism. It carried a cool journalistic analysis of Bangabandhu's historic speech, and the whole work was done in a great linguistic style.

I must confess, I never came across a better piece of writing — either in English or in Bangla — on that epic speech of Bangabandhu. In fact, I was so overwhelmed by Mr Anam's article, as I had been by the speech itself, 26 years ago, that I immediately decided to have it photocopied and mailed out to my friends and relatives living abroad including some foreigners interested in the history of the birth of Bangladesh.

Kausar Ahmed Chaudhury
81/A Azimpur Estate, Dhaka

Good News

Sir, Along with protecting against heart disease and osteoporosis, ESTROGEN REPLACEMENT THERAPY may ward off another ill; degenerative arthritis. The risk of osteoarthritis of the hip may be cut by nearly half in women who take estrogen for at least 10 years. Once therapy is stopped, the benefit vanishes.

Source: Archives of internal medicine.
Dr Rummy Tabrez Hyder
222-KA Malibagh, Dhaka-1217