

# Envisioning Bangladesh in the Next Millennium

by Dr Abul Kalam

**What seems vital is to reflect on our national development in the coming millennium, to offer vision-biased and projection oriented ideas and thought, keeping a perspective of the country's underlying malaise as well as future potentials, and the thesis be backed up by an appropriate analytical framework of inquiry.**

NATIONS like individuals must have dreams and visions. A nation without an objective policy vision or dream is no more than a ship without a radar. Famed as "the newest infant" of South Asia, Bangladesh has already completed its childhood, having gone through the most tumultuous period of the twenty-fifth year of its existence as an independent nation-state entity. It is soon poised to enter the next millennium. During the last quarter of a century there were times of deep despair and gloom as well as moments of gaiety and hope. Every moment during its Shaheed Day, Victory and Independence Day celebrations since its founding has been marked by gala festivities as well as by a renewal of faith in "Sonar Bangla" (the golden Bengal), the dream envisioned by the founding father of the country at its very nascent stage of struggle for independence. The former Prime Minister, and now the leader of the opposition, Begum Khaleda Zia, while in power had also envisioned Bangladesh as an "emerging tiger," a sort of replica of the tiger economies of East Asia.

**The Current Realities**  
The festivities and visions represented not only the joy of creation of a new state out of torpor of exploitation and colonialism of two orders, internal and external, but also epitomized the expectations of a prosperous Bangladesh where security would return and where the citizens would see the fulfilment of the material well-being and more subtle needs of their life and living. Many of those expectations were obscured by the gloom of natural and man-made calamities, famine and mass starvation. There was then political uncertainty created by the killings that included two of its most illustrious leaders. In the first instance, the killers did not spare even the family and the very person who immensely suffered under the alien rule and spearheaded the entire movement for the country's independence. In the second case, the killers brutally murdered the very person who earned laurels for his gallantry as a liberation war hero and inspired the

Bengali armed forces, breaking and defying the alien chain of command, and vowed to struggle for independence. Politically, there were misperceived blunders and errors of judgements, marked by a noticeable failure on the part of the successive leadership in the years since independence. The introduction of one-party rule, the successive coup d'etat, the planting of the military in civilian affairs, widespread corruption and perpetuation of almost unhindered autocracy for nine years — all degenerated the nation's political culture and foreshadowed an environment of despair and gloom. The return of democracy and a return to parliamentary system of governance raised expectations once again, but after a short spell of three years disillusionment again gripped the nation following incessant political agitation on various issues, with an intensified scale of violence on the demand for a caretaker administration. The caretaker system of provisional governance run up to every election is now institutionalized, but democratic governance seems a difficult terrain.

**Diagnosing Past Ills**  
It is apparent that democracy itself alone does not guarantee peace or stability and growth. The country has a bureaucracy and technocracy that is not only ill-famed for its corruption and inefficiency but also is deeply divided and even at odds with itself. At the cultural level there is a pride tradition to take inspiration from; yet the country's political divide appears to have its cultural ramifications, too. The level and percentage of education is far too low, and so is the level of health and nutrition. Socially and morally, the country's track record is under strain, with our human rights performance coming under an in-

creasing international probing. In the field of diplomacy and foreign policy Bangladesh retains the primacy of its initiatives, but the achievements remain subject to question mark and the country's multilevel security concerns remain fragile as ever. An effort has been underway to change the national image abroad, but external reality, though economic diplomacy finds an adornment more often than before.

In the domain of economics, the country has had barely feeble growth during the last quarter of a century. Agricultural production of late has shown signs of improvement, but still subject to climatic variations and vagaries of nature, with no substantial introduction of scientific innovations. Projection about the country's very physical survival is alarming. However, with a little hindsight of our own experiences of recent past, it is possible to suggest that the sacrifice of the millions of martyrs in the Liberation War should be a constant reminder to rededicate us to accomplish the causes for which they gave their life and blood, and that the pattern of endless struggle against alien impositions and exploitation itself is to manifest our resilience as a people. The country's human and certain sectors of natural resource potentials are now known to be quite high. The industrial sector, especially garments, despite occasional setback, has proven to be fairly competitive. The NGO experience, such as that of the Grameen Bank, is of unique order and has been replicated in over fifty countries of the world. All these do speak of dynamism and possibilities.

**Mapping New Visions**  
As Bangladesh edges toward the next millennium, it contin-

ues to draw poor image for itself. Political system currently presents a lackluster look, with a seemingly bungled leadership on either side of the political spectrum. With governance and bureaucracy apparently dysfunctional, political forecast may be a little difficult. There is then a dwindling economy, with ominous signs of recession — a burdensome public sector; poorer industrial performance; an unproductive labor force with, and endless demand for, higher wages; a collapsing Stock Market; a barely low reserve in the central banking institution, with the added burden of a chronic symptoms of a crippling power shortage — all this hardly contribute to a heartwarming scenario to offer in terms of projection about the future of the country. A divided cultural front, a terror-ridden public educational sector, an unashamedly profit-seeking private educational sector, offer a little cheerful notes. Hopes nevertheless are there in the potentials, both human and material, and adversity has always been the handmaiden of affluence of the most powerful nation-state actors.

Nothing is more important, it seems, than offering a framework for policy change and blueprint of action. Who can take the challenging task? It is a huge task and should be seen as a national responsibility, but the University of Dhaka must act as a beacon and guidepost in the search for a true destiny. As the largest concentration of analysts and scholars in the country it must show the way. Abode of 1952 language movement, 1962 education movement, 1969 mass upsurge, 1971 liberation struggle and 1990 anti-autocracy movement, the University of Dhaka cannot escape its intellectual responsibility to play a role in ushering hope to replace the glut of despair and gloom.

What is needed is a platform of scholarly communication and eventual production of cumulative ideas and empirical oriented thought on various aspects of national life, touching on the encompassing issues of culture and literature, education and politics, government and technology, diplomacy, foreign policy and security.

**Charting Research Frontiers**  
Obviously quarter of a century may not appear as a great time-span in the life of a nation, but then in a world of rising expectations people of a new generation are not expected to have abiding patience before they can enjoy the fruits of independence. Hence it is critically important that through a process of moral reappraisal and soul-searching we look both backward and forward for self-reflection; we have little option but endeavour to develop a blueprint and a framework of action so that the country and its teeming millions have a better, secured future in the next millennium.

Manifold questions are in

order. Is there an innate fault-line in our political culture or is it that there is a serious peccadillo in our social dynamism or lapse in our leadership nature? Do we have a congenitally national culture we can take pride of, that can indeed serve as the source of our strength and provide guideline for the future? Are we negatively biased towards change or is it that we do not feel motivated towards positive ideas? How can we renew our faith in the spirit of our Liberation War and rededicate ourselves to the task of nation-building?

What is the state of the country's economy and what measures can an envisions to ensure an economic future for the country? What data do we have about the economic viability of the country and do the data speak of the foreign donors or investors being interested in rescuing our future destiny? Is it still right to suggest that Bangladesh has little natural resource endowment or how best the country can utilize its known natural resources in order to ensure a better prospect for the teeming millions of impoverished people? Do we have the right kind of institutional mechanisms, bureaucracy and technocracy, for running the affairs of the state with sincerity, effectiveness and devotion? Do we have the intellectual base to recast our image, and if not what role perception can the Dhaka University community may offer to redeem national hope? What is the state of scientific development or technological innovation in the country and how can we seek to improvise upon them in the near future?

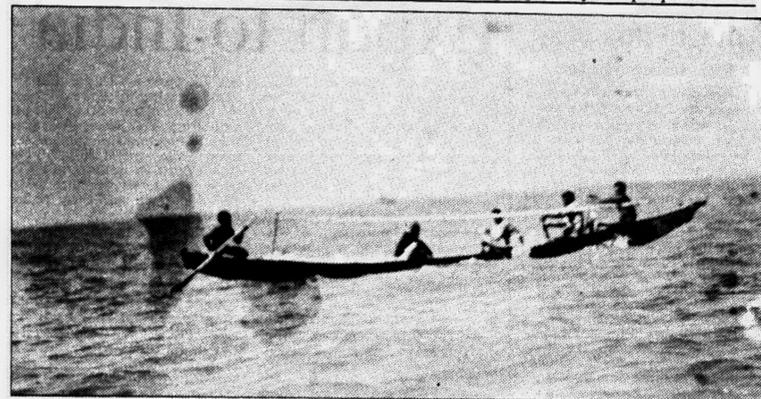
What are the country's security predicaments and how best can we overcome them? In the light of recent diplomatic and foreign policy initiatives are we moving anywhere nearer to our true destiny in seeking national readjustments with the objectives of regionalism and subregionalism in the post-Cold War era? Succinctly, any research or inquiry for envisioning the future of Bangladesh in the next millennium should contemplate linking a chain of issues since the spirit of the Liberation War and the renewal of national faith; politics and systems of governance; bureaucracy and local government mechanisms; gender, social structure and change; economy touching on aspects of agriculture, industry and natural resources, foreign portfolio and direct investment; demographic change and population pressure; ecology and environment; education and human resource development; the future of scientific innovations and technological developments; national defence and national security in the post-Cold War era; diplomacy, foreign policy, regionalism and subregionalism. What seems vital is to reflect on our national development in the coming millennium, to offer vision-biased and projection oriented ideas and thought, keeping a perspective of the country's underlying malaise as well as future potentials, and the thesis be backed up by an appropriate analytical framework of inquiry. Only objective and replicable scholarship can take up such a challenge. The country potentially needs leadership with vision in offering scholarly perspectives as much as in politics and governance.

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# SEA BOUNDARY Off-Shore Resources in the Bay

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

**Once the sea boundary is demarcated, Bangladesh will be able to allocate more off-shore areas to foreign companies to unlock the riches from and under the sea-bed. The prospect is unlimited for the prosperity and progress of our people.**



**B**ANGLADESH with its increasing population of about 124 million in a land territory of 55 thousand square miles needs to explore and exploit the living and non-living resources of the sea. The nature of marine resources is yet unknown to us. Considering that humans have smashed the atom, climbed Mount Everest and landed on the moon, our ignorance about the resources of the sea is a breathtaking gap in science.

Besides the traditional non-living resources of sea such as oil or gas, we could be amazed at the life forms that could live in deep sea on the continental shelf (ocean floor). Deep ocean could become one of the sources of food for our massive population.

The prospect for exploitation of mineral resources from the sea-bed appears to be great. Some experts take the view that the mineral deposits are greater in sea than those in land. The sea-bed covers 71 per cent of the world's area and it contains approximately 293 chemical elements. As the resources of the land diminish, there would be scramble for the resources on the sea-bed.

The marine resources have become all the important because Bangladesh could claim 200 miles of Exclusive Economic Zone and 350 miles of Continental shelf pursuant to the provisions of 1982 UN convention on the Law of the Sea (which came into force in 1994). The new legal regime provides an opportunity for Bangladesh to explore and exploit much wider and deeper areas of the Bay of Bengal than before.

Bangladesh will require foreign investment to explore and exploit the resources of the sea. Foreign investment may not be attractive until the off-shore area is found to be within the jurisdiction of Bangladesh. In this context it is important that Bangladesh needs to settle the sea boundary agreement with both India and Myanmar. Negotiations with both countries commenced in 1974 and there were series of meetings with the representatives of both countries in the intervening years. However, the negotiations remained inconclusive both with India and Myanmar. It was apparent that a new dimension was introduced in the negotiations because of the impact on

the nature and extent of the claim on the areas in the Bay of Bengal in terms of the provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Bangladesh is an adjacent country to its neighbours as distinct from opposite. Geographically India and Sri Lanka are opposite to each other while Bangladesh is not. This distinction is very significant and has considerable ramifications in delimitation of the sea boundary with India and Burma. Another fact is that Bangladesh is a geographically disadvantaged country because its coastal line is concave in shape and highly indented. Bangladesh has to ensure that its frontal opening to the sea does not become locked in the competing claims from India in the West and Myanmar in the East. Bangladesh must have an open wide front to the high seas in the Bay of Bengal.

One has to acknowledge that the jurisdiction on the sea emanates from the sovereignty over its land domain. If there is no land territory bordering the sea, no jurisdiction could be claimed on the sea. (A landlocked country can not claim jurisdiction on the sea because its land domain is not adjacent to the sea.) Furthermore, I would argue that the shape of the land domain has a direct bearing on its jurisdiction on the sea. If one takes an aerial view of Bangladesh, its physical contours would look roughly rectangular in shape. What I emphasize is that there is an inherent connection between the shape of the land domain and its boundary on the sea. Following this principle, Bangladesh's boundary on the sea would be rectangular in its length and width.

Bangladesh is a deltaic country and three of the biggest rivers in the world flow through this country. The estuary has many unique characteristics. Its waters are unstable because of the monsoon rains and the silt the rivers bring down from the catchment areas in the Himalayas. The silt gives formation of innumerable coastal new small islets almost every year replacing the earlier ones. The waters are in a constant flux.

I would strongly argue that all the above features described are to be taken into account in

the delimitation of sea boundary of Bangladesh.

The existing legal regime I would argue is that the sea boundary would be guided by the principles of equity as between the adjacent countries. Notions of fairness, proportionality and the size and shape of the land are ingrained in the principle of equity. This principle found recognition by the World Court in *North Sea Continental Shelf Cases* (1969:ICJ:general list: nos 51 & 52). Subsequently the UN Convention recognized it. (Articles 74 & 83 of the Convention). The Articles of the Convention emphasised that any agreement arrived at must achieve "an equitable solution".

One of the methods known as "equi-distance method" could be applicable between the opposite countries. This method is not applicable to draw the sea boundary between the adjacent countries (India and Myanmar) as it disregards the physical features of the country and does not achieve "an equitable solution" as mandated by the UN Convention. If this method is applied, the boundary between the adjacent countries will be unfair, distorted and inequitable.

In my view, the sea boundary of Bangladesh with its neighbours should be drawn compatible with the provisions of the UN Convention so as to achieve "an equitable solution". I would suggest that the sea boundary could be drawn by stages — first on the territorial sea, followed by Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and thereafter the continental shelf. Each has a jurisdiction of different length. The territorial sea would cover 12 nautical miles from Bangladesh baseline, the EEZ another 188 miles and finally the continental shelf would cover another 150 miles from the end of EEZ jurisdiction.

Once the sea boundary is demarcated, Bangladesh will be able to allocate more off-shore areas to foreign companies to unlock the riches from and under the sea-bed. The prospect is unlimited for the prosperity and progress of our people.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN in Geneva.

## Garfield®

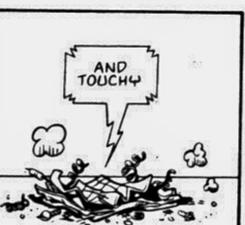


Tom and Jerry



Tom and Jerry

## by Jim Davis



Tom and Jerry



Tom and Jerry

## Maltreatment in jail custody caused Sima's death: BSEHR

The Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) yesterday said procrastination, maltreatment and delayed medicare in jail custody were the causes of death of Sima Chowdhury, who was raped by police in Raozan, Chittagong, reports UNB.

Addressing a press conference at Jatiya Press Club in the morning, BSEHR Secretary general advocate Sigma Huda demanded immediate punishment to the culprits.

She said had there been proper investigation into the murder of Sima and punishment to the culprits, the incidents of rape and repression on women would have been checked largely.

Referring to Tuesday's incident on the Dhaka Court premises, where a five-year-old girl was raped in a police control room, Sigma Huda advanced a number of recommendations to protect the rights of women.

The recommendations are: Separate shelter homes for women in judicial custody, which should be run under the supervision of both government and private voluntary organizations, preferably those working on human rights and women's rights, repeal of Section 54 of CrPC which is largely abused by the police, and immediate medical examination of rape victims so that the physical evidence is not destroyed due to delay.

BSEHR executive director Aminul Islam and director (investigation) Advocate Elna Khan were present.

## What's on today...

**Workshop:** A 4-day workshop on 'food assisted development activities in Bangladesh' will begin. Organisers: LGED and WFP. Bangladesh. Venue: LGED Bhaban, Agargaon (2nd level). Time: 9:30 am.

**Inaugural ceremony:** The inaugural ceremony of the 2nd International Conference on Cardiovascular Diseases will be held. Organisers: National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases, Dhaka and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Venue: Hotel Sonargaon. Time: 9 am.

**Lokonatyad Theatre Festival:** 'Kanjus' will be staged on the concluding day of the festival. Venue: Public Library auditorium. Time: 7 pm.

**Film show:** 'Horror' will be screened as part of a Peter Lilienthal Retrospective, organised by Bangladesh Short Film Forum and Bangladesh Federation of Film Societies. Venue: German Cultural Centre. Time: 6 pm.

**Lecture:** Kamal Lohani will give a lecture on 'Progressive cultural movement in Bangladesh', organised by 'Samaj Chetona' in memory of Latifa Kawsayen. Venue: Aziz Supermarket, 3rd floor, Shahbagh. Time: 4:30 pm.

**Workshop on trade:** An international workshop on 'multilateral trade agreements and labour standards' will be held. Organiser: Bangladesh Garments Workers and Employees Federation. Venue: CIDRAP auditorium, Topkhana Road. Time: 10 am.

**Conference:** A rally and discussion meeting will be held marking the third conference of Samajtantrik Chhatra Front. Venue: 'Bototola' and TSC crossing respectively. Time: 11 am and 4 pm.

**Club meeting:** The weekly meeting of Rotary Club of Dhanmudi will be held. Guest speaker: Dr Syed Mukarram Ali will talk on 'private medical service in Bangladesh'. Venue: 1st/2nd Family Lounge, Dhaka Club. Time: 5:30 pm.

**Club meeting:** The weekly meeting of Rotary Club of Jahangirnagar Dhaka will be held. Venue: Officers' Club, Baily Road. Time: 5:30 pm.

## Weather

### Thundershowers forecast

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind may occur at one or two places over Khulna, Dhaka and Sylhet divisions and the regions of Pabna, Bogra, Noakhali and Comilla during the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

According to the Met office, weather may remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky elsewhere across the country during the period. Slight rise in day temperature is also expected.

The sun sets today at 6:06 pm and rises tomorrow at 6:10 am.

## Metropolitan

### Family health hospital for women to be built

A family health hospital for women will be built in the country under the auspices of International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) for providing modern and better treatment to the mothers and their babies, reports BSS.

This was conveyed to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by IPPF president Dr Attiya Inayatullah who called on the Prime Minister at her office yesterday.

The IPPF president said that the traditional maternity centres are no more enough to cope with the complex problems of the pregnant women and the newborn babies.

The Prime Minister stressed the need for expansion of women reproductive education for attaining desired success in family planning thrust.

She also listed a number of steps taken by her government for empowerment of women and generation of self-employment opportunities for the women.

President of the Family Planning Association of Bangladesh Dr Neelima Ibrahim was also present.

### Muktijuddho mela from March 27

A preparatory meeting to organise "Muktijuddho Mela" was held at Biswa Sahitya Kendra auditorium in the city yesterday, reports UNB.

Ekatattur Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee will organise the week-long fair from March 27 to commemorate the anniversary of independence.

The preparatory meeting was addressed, among others by Prof Kabir Chowdhury, Khan Sarwar, Murshid, Shahrir Kabir, Golam Qudus, Osman Ghani, Khaled Khan, Justice K M Subhan presided over the meeting.

### First half of current fiscal PDB realises Tk 877 cr in electric bills

The Power Development Board (PDB) has realised Taka 877 crore in electric bills in the first half of the current financial year, which is Tk 105 crore more than the corresponding period of the last fiscal, reports BSS.

This was informed at a meeting of the board yesterday. Revenue situation of the unitwise electricity supply was reviewed. PDB Chairman Nuruddin Mahmud Kamal presided over the meeting.

### Discussion on 50 years of Language Movement held

A discussion meeting on "Fifty years of Language Movement and State Language of Bangladesh" was held at the TSC of Dhaka University yesterday.

Eminent literateurs and heroes of the Language Movement including Gazi Shamsur Rahman, Dr Abdullah Al-Muti Shafiquddin, Dr Asuzzaman, Fakruzzaman Chowdhury, M Azizur Rahman and Dr Israel Khan took part in the discussion, organised by Bangla Samity, a forum of former students of Bengali department of the university.

The speakers observed that Bengali could not yet be introduced in all spheres of national life and in the administration because of lack of will by successive governments. They said, in fact, the Language Movement had started on March 11, 1948 when a hartal was observed in Dhaka city for introduction of Bengali as a state language.

### Planned land management stressed

A three-day international conference on "21st Century: The Value of Geography and the Challenge Ahead" began on the Jahangirnagar University (JU) campus yesterday.

Vice Chancellor of Open University Prof Aminul Islam inaugurated the conference, organised by Bangladesh Bhugol Samity (Bangladesh Geographical Society). Presided over by the president of the Samity, Prof Mesbah-Ul-Saleheen, the conference was addressed, among others, by JU VC Prof Amirul Islam Chowdhury, Chairman of JU Geography Department Prof AK Azizul Haq Bhuiyan and Samity secretary Sazed Ashraf Karim.

Stressing on a planned land management, urbanisation and housing policy, the speakers said that an integrated effort is required to save our alling environment, which is being throttled by modern technologies and unplanned development activities.

A member of papers on environment and geographical aspects will be presented at the conference.

### Hasina accorded life membership of DU Alumni Assoc

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was accorded life membership of the Dhaka University Alumni Association when the office-bearers of the association called on her yesterday at her office, reports BSS.

Speaking on the occasion the Prime Minister, a former Dhaka University student, said that frequent exchange of views between the former students and the new generation could bring about meaningful and effective results in the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom.

### Obituary

Shafiqullah Khan, a former Director General of Supply and Inspection Directorate, died of old-age ailment in the city yesterday.

Khan left behind his wife, a son and three daughters. He will be buried at his family graveyard at Chunchi in Chittagong today. His kulkhwan will be held at House No. 8/E, Road No. 17/A, Banani on Friday after Asr prayers.

Mahfuza Khanam, wife of late Golam Mustafa, a retired school teacher, died at her village home at Shahbazpur under Nabinagar thana in Brahmanbaria district yesterday. She was 60, reports BSS.

Family sources here said Mahfuza Khanam was suffering from hypertension.

She left behind two sons, four daughters.

Her eldest son, Anis Ahmed, is the bureau chief of Reuters News Agency in Dhaka.

Zakiuddin Ahmed, Accounts Officer of Engineering Section, Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU), Mymensingh died of cancer on Friday morning at his residence at BAU campus. He was 57, reports BSS.

Late Zakiuddin Ahmed left behind his wife, four sons, three daughters.

His nazam-e-janaja was held at his village home Dhanikhola under Trishal thana and he was buried at his family graveyard.

Shamsul Huda, a retired SP, died yesterday of old age complication. He was 84, says a press release.

His nazam-e-janaja will be held today after Jolh prayers at Lalmatia Masjid in the city.