

## FOCUS

## Role of Commonwealth in the 21st Century

The Commonwealth's unique institution, its Ministerial Action Group, plays an increasingly important role in this process of deepening democracy. The ministerial action group has proved its worth several times over in upholding the values of the Commonwealth to which we, as parliamentarians, are all committed good governance, the rule of law and human rights.

by Tony Blair

There is a tendency to see the Commonwealth as a group of countries bound by historical ties of friendship. It certainly is that. But in a world where globalisation is bringing countries closer together it is also an organisation with a unique role to play in the future. A role based on shared values and shared experiences that cuts across the traditional divisions of East and West, North and South. A role that offers a way of addressing the problems of the twenty-first century together: poverty, development, political and economic reform.

At the Heads of Government meeting in South Africa last year, we agreed to establish a High Level Review Group to find ways of modernising the Commonwealth so that it can respond to the challenges we now face. I was encouraged, at our recent meeting in New York, by the progress made.

We are rightly now focusing on the areas where the Commonwealth can really make a difference, complementing the work of other international organisations. One such area is in strengthening democracy in member countries. The Commonwealth has led the world in defining the fundamental political principles of good governance, the principles upon which the Commonwealth was founded.

The Commonwealth's unique

institution, its Ministerial Action Group, plays an increasingly important role in this process of deepening democracy. The ministerial action group has proved its worth several times over in upholding the values of the Commonwealth to which we, as parliamentarians, are all committed good governance, the rule of law and human rights.

The Commonwealth also has a vital contribution to make in areas such as trade and investment, environment, IT, education. Work is already in hand. The Edinburgh meeting in 1997 played a significant role, setting up the Commonwealth Business Council, with financial support from the British Government. And I am delighted by the excellent work it is now doing.

Commonwealth leaders place great value on the CPA's input to the Commonwealth agenda. These conferences provide a unique opportunity for parliamentarians throughout the Commonwealth to exchange ideas and to reach conclusions on the challenges we jointly face. And I look forward to hearing the results of your discussions. I hope it will allow you to strengthen the networks between our countries, as well as helping to shape the Commonwealth's evolving role for this new century.

The author is Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. The article is based on his speech at the opening of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference at Westminster Hall, London on 21 September, 2000.

## IT Parks in Bangladesh: Hard Problems for Software?

We dream our software industry of being worth 5/6 billion dollars in next 10 years. We have to undertake some challenging missions.... One can also envision the richest man of Bangladesh after 10 years would be a computer wizard or an infopreneur or a netpreneur. E-business is the ultimate way to materialise our vision.

by Ahmed Salman

tional education system does not help to develop incognitve skills in students which is a must for IT-related jobs.

There should be a 'networking culture' that drives information around the park. A database can be built to share knowledge and expertise. A strong monitoring system must be there to keep vigil on franchised training centres. Are they really offering world-class training or just harnessing money out of sheer enthusiastic puzzlement? We have to keep in mind that we cannot expect other countries to show us the right direction so that we can compete with them globally in near future. Can we? We get to do it by ourselves.

The government can play a crucial role in providing the basic infrastructure and business environment. It needs to provide full administrative support, implement underlining cabling project, enforce Intellectual Property Right and Deregulation of Telecommunications. It should have task force and action plan. It has to implement the suggestions of JRC Committee without any further delay. It can adopt the Korean style in getting back the drained brains by offering international remuneration package. On the top of that, it must foster an effective system to facilitate International technology transfer and know-how.

The business strategy will be critical success factor for Bangladesh's software industry. We must have pre-emptive core

competencies for sustainable growth.

A dynamic leader like Chandrababu Naidu, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, is desperately sought after in our country. A SWOT analysis of our software industry will speak out our strengths, weaknesses, potential opportunities and threats in the twinkle of an eye. We have to identify the emerging opportunities with a new perspective. We have to dominate our local market and gain experience from it.

A skilled, English-speaking workforce and their ability to adapt and learn the emerging technologies will help us compete globally successfully. There should be interacting specialist companies rather than independent ones. They must possess rich ecology of deeply interdependent systems. It must be adaptable so that it can cope with change.

Companies with valued systems, processes, sound management principles and business models, will become effective players. We need to follow the catchword - think global but act local. Our software companies are focusing on low-cost model that in turn is unsustainable in the long run. We have to keep in mind that branding is important for sustainable growth. Though the trend is rare in our local market and most of our companies are very small in size and revenues at present, merger and acquisition will be helpful to have synergies in future.

Infosys has become benchmark for Indian IT industry. We have to benchmark the business model of Infosys to be a successful player. Whereas we are still focused on low-cost model as mentioned earlier; companies must have a mix of onsite and offsite projects, quality initiatives and good quality processes in place to move up the value chain. But we are thinking of having projects through sub contracts with neighbouring country. But will they allow us to move up the value chain in future? We need to think twice. There should be some alternative ways to enter into global market.

IT parks will never be well equipped without having proper e-business infrastructure. IT park consultancy group can have salient role to provide local companies with right direction for switching to 'Clicks and Mortar' model from traditional 'Bricks and Mortar' business model. One of the easiest ways to have technical expertise and know-how is through joint venture. There should be R&D section at least for quickly absorbing international technology and know-how.

E-commerce projects are on the increase, they are called Extended Enterprise Resource Planning that consists of Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Enterprise Planning (ERP) and Supply Chain Management (SCM). Those projects will be mix of onsite work and offshore projects as mentioned earlier. Nowadays, onshore projects are on the increase due to e-commerce onsite projects which in turn give long-term benefits to software companies. We have to not only diversify and identify growing areas but also diversify and spread business across clients and geographic locations. For example, Application Service Provider (ASP) is another interesting growing segment.

If we have a look at professional skills needed from corporate strategy up to software database, the scenario can be as follows:

Business Strategy
Business Process Reengineering
Information System Strategy
Business Analysis
System Analysis
System Design
Programming
Database Administration

The hierarchy evidently expresses that we don't have all

## Meeting the Architect of Evergreen Revolution

Swaminathan is quick to remind us that the most essential factor for any workable paradigm is real synergy between political power and people power. About this and everything else Swaminathan's emphatic words are: "Ultimately, it is the political will of the country to have policies in place....Without it, all research, technology... external advice will be in vain."

by Neeman A. Sobhan

Research Foundation.

The aim of the research centre is to marry science and technology for environmentally sustainable and socially equitable development, and the programmes are pro-nature, pro-poor, and pro-women.

Swaminathan believes that social progress can take place not by technological development alone but by combining it with social mobilization and information dissemination. To promote this at both macro and micro levels, the MSSRF has worked in the fields of strategic and participatory research, education, training, human resource development, networking, policy advocacy and dialogues. His agricultural research often involves farmers as partners. In fact it is Dr. Swaminathan's continuous efforts for the welfare of the marginalised that is the most admirable side of this scientist-humanitarian.

Dedicated to alleviating poverty, increasing food supply, conserving biodiversity as well as the rights of its traditional conservers, and ensuring income opportunities through blending traditional and modern technologies including ICT, he is constantly trying to extend benefits to the disadvantaged. The man behind the 'Green Revolution' is now the spokesman for what he terms as the 'Ever-green Revolution'. He elaborates thus:

"Since land and water will be shrinking resources for agriculture, there is no option in the future except to produce more food...through higher yields per unit of land, water, energy and time. It would therefore be useful

to examine how science can be mobilised for raising further the ceiling to biological productivity without associated ecological harm. It will be appropriate to refer to the emerging scientific progress on the farms as an 'evergreen revolution', to emphasise that the productivity advance is sustainable over time since it is rooted in the principles of ecology, economics, social and gender equity and employment generation."

Regarding the 'Gene Revolution' and the controversy surrounding Genetic Modification of Organisms, he discussed the problem at length, specially where it affects biodiversity and biopiracy. Unless research and development efforts on GM foods are based on principles of bioethics, biosafety, biodiversity conservation and biopartnerships, there will be serious public concerns in developing countries about the ultimate nutritional, social, ecological and economic consequences of replacing numerous local varieties with a few GMOs...

The need of the hour is to enlarge the food basket and not shrink it. Also, the contributions of tribal and rural women and men to genetic resources conservation and enhancement needs recognition and reward... At present, the primary conservers remain poor, while those who use their knowledge and material become rich. It is time that genetic engineers promote genuine biopartnerships with the holders of indigenous knowledge based on principles of ethics and equity sharing." And

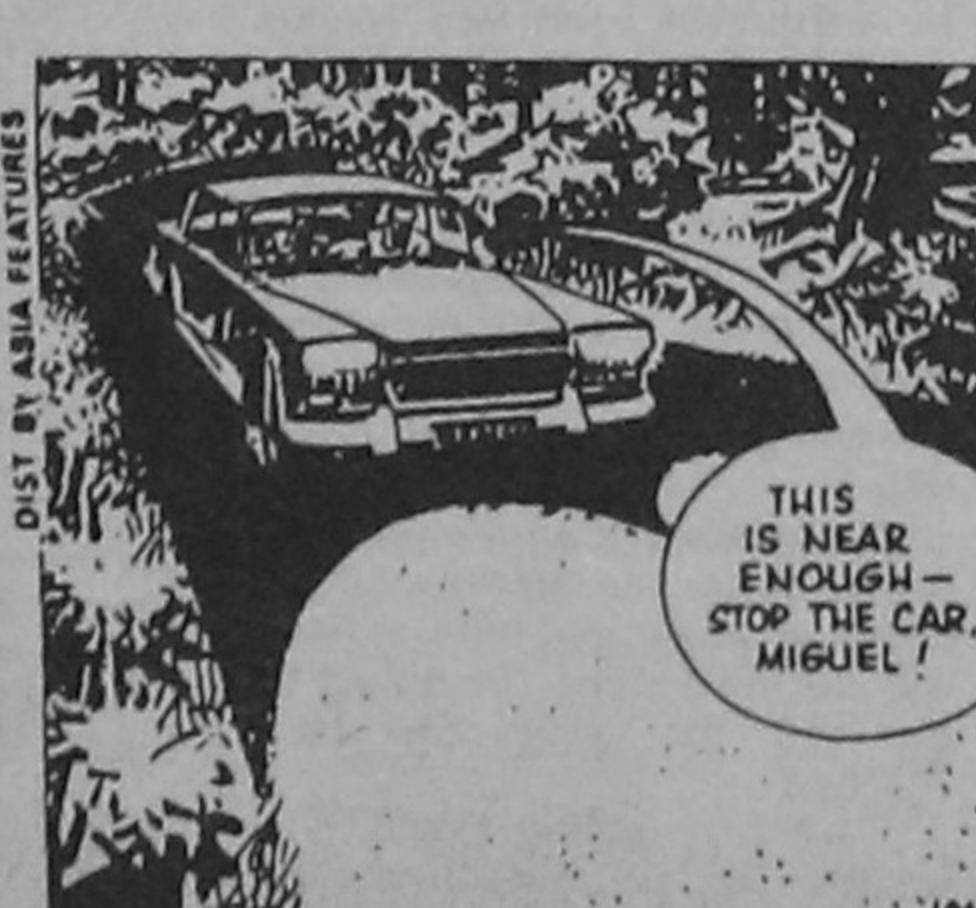
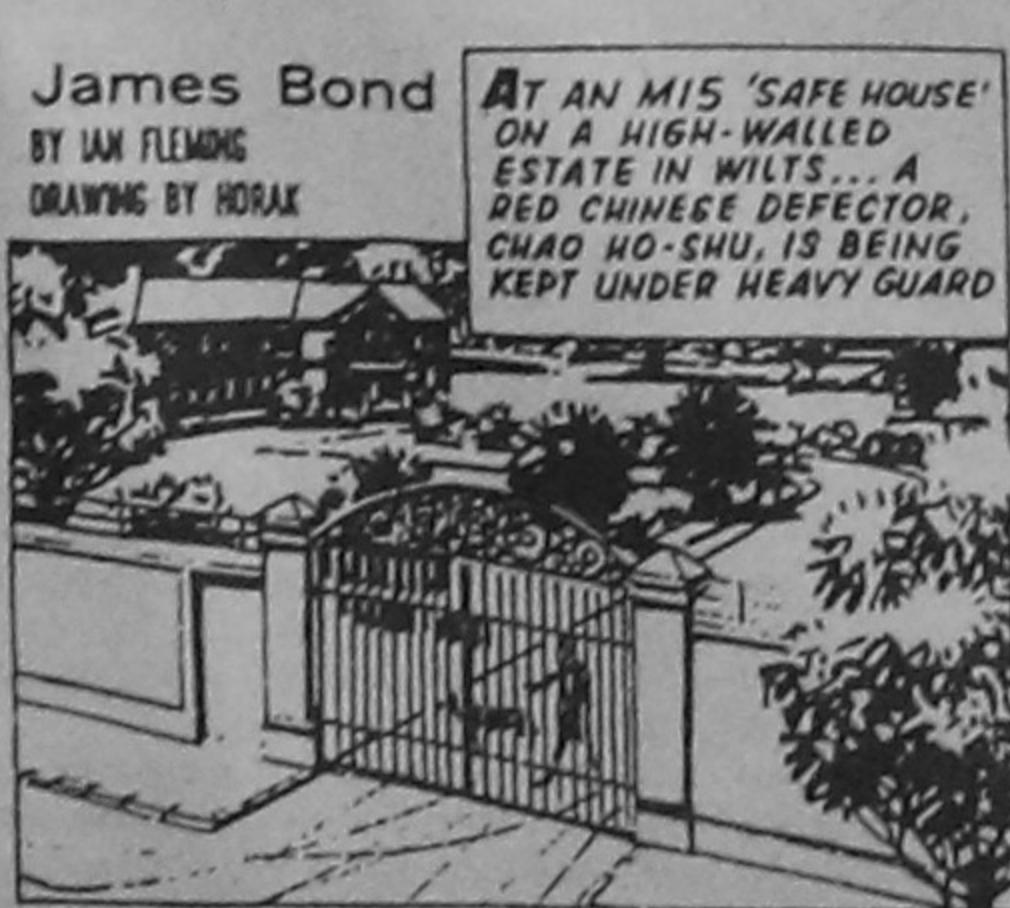
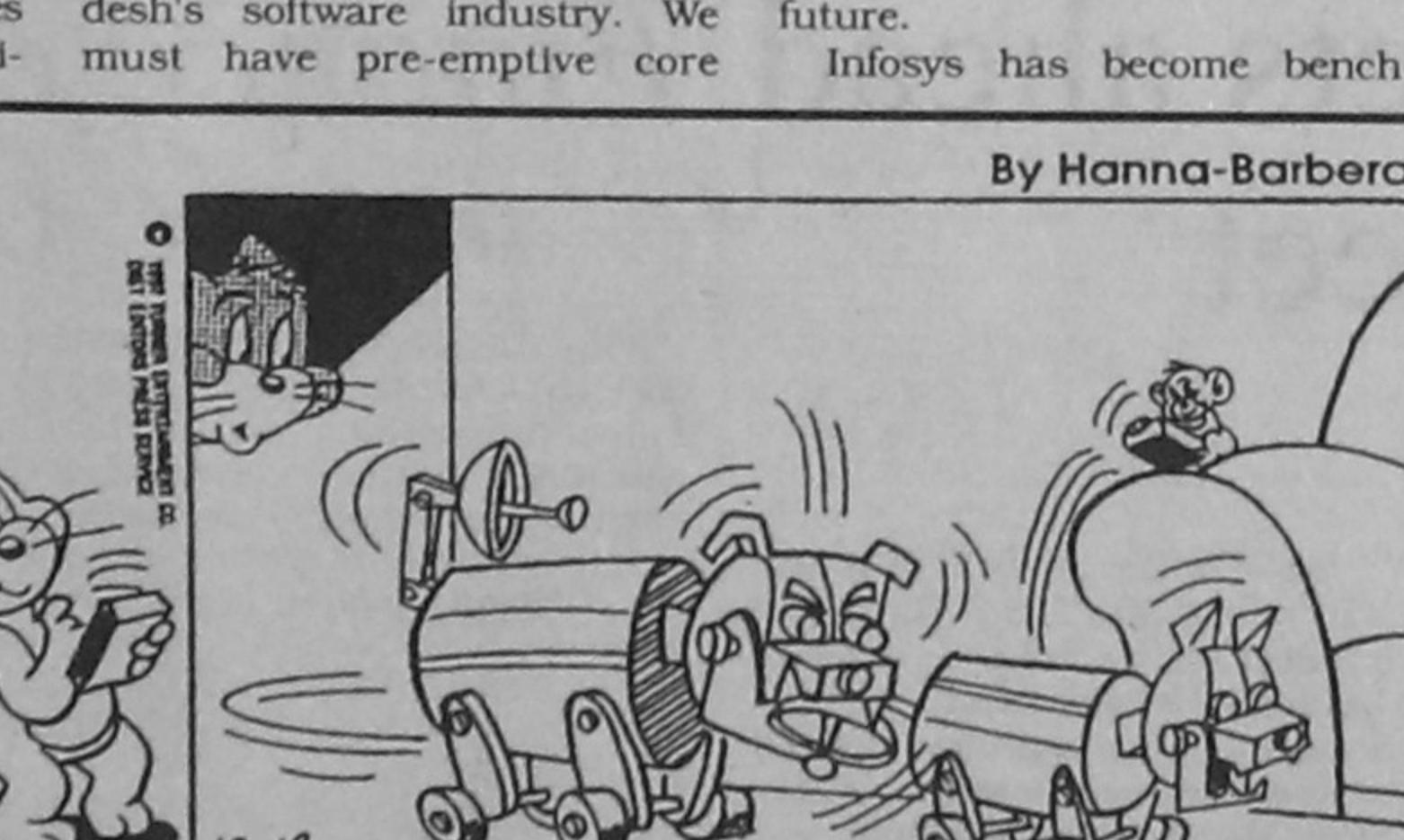
with these issues he is constantly concerned and waging battle, as well as spreading awareness.

But the main concern of his lecture pivoted around the model he is working on for poverty eradication and environment protection, called the 'Bio-Village' paradigm, supported by IFAD and UNDP. His plea to IFAD was that it should launch a global Biovillage Movement in developing countries. And what this Biovillage paradigm or movement?

The term 'biovillage' means a village where human centered development assumes primacy. It helps to promote ecotechnology, which brings wisdom of the past and innovations of the present into a synergistic blend. It views natural resources conservation and enhancement as basic to sustainable human livelihoods. It helps to foster the integrated growth of on-farm and off-farm employment. The Village Biocentre forms the hub of the movement, providing key centralised services to support decentralised production. Through organisation of enterprise based self-help groups supported by micro-finance, it empowers rural families to control their own destiny. Young women and men, whether literate or semi-literate, become the doers and prime movers of the integrated ecological and livelihood security programmes."

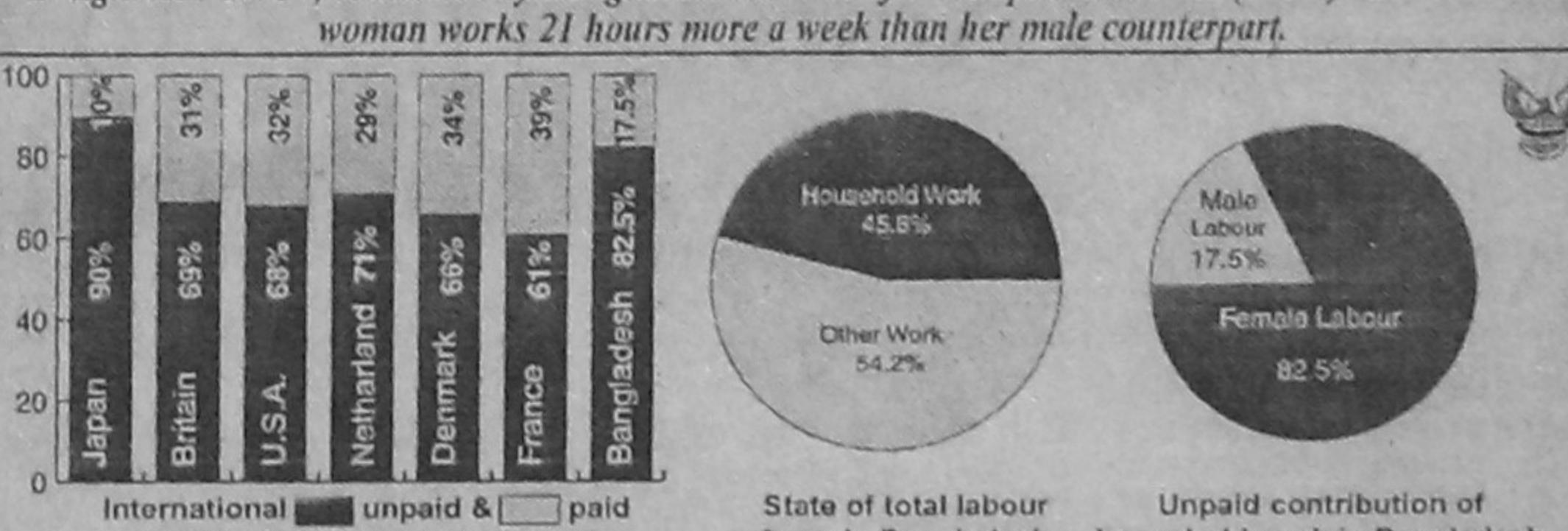
But, Swaminathan is quick to remind us that the most essential factor for any workable paradigm is real synergy between political power and people power. About this and everything else Swaminathan's emphatic words are: "Ultimately, it is the political will of the country to have policies in place....Without it, all research, technology... external advice will be in vain."

The writer is the Rome based editor of the IFAD publication INTERFACE



### The labour: the Bangladeshi women put in household work is unrecognised. The 1989-95 labour force survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics categorised 95% of women aged 10 to 65 as housewives.

A 1998 study on gender issues conducted by Steps Towards Development, an NGO, showed that 54.4 percent of women are now engaged in the agricultural sector. It mentioned that a housewife works 200 days a year in the self-rearing sector while other members of the family work only 100 hours. The total working hours of men and women in the self-rearing sector is 69,000 million, of which women work 44,000 million hours. Another study, "Trade Liberalization and Its Impact on Women: The Case of Bangladesh 1995", conducted by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) revealed that a woman works 21 hours more a week than her male counterpart.



State of total labour force in Bangladesh. Household Work 45.6%, Other Work 54.2%.

Unpaid contribution of household work in Bangladesh. Male Labour 17.5%, Female Labour 82.5%.

Invisible contributions of women to society came into the limelight when the System of National Account (SNA) of the United Nations was adopted in 1993. According to the 1993 UNDP study, goods worth 16 trillion US dollars are produced and consumed by households worldwide. Of those, \$1 trillion US dollars are produced by women. The study revealed that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country may increase by 20-35 percent if the working hours of women doing household work could be included in the market value.

In Bangladesh, the condition of a working woman is even worse than that of a housewife because she has to do all the household works of the family in addition to her job. According to a survey conducted by the UNDP, a working woman spends 30 hours on household work a week while a non-working housewife spends 40 hours. The International Labour Organisation and SNA favour bringing household work under the GDP of the country. But the authorities in Bangladesh have not yet adopted the SNA system and the government has no plan right at the moment to bring household work under the GDP, said a senior official at the Labour Directorate.

"The government is still following the age-old gender-biased system instead of taking appropriate steps to evaluate the household work put by women," says Salma Ali of Bangladesh Jatiya Mohila Ainjibi Samity emphasising the need for massive campaign on the issue.