

The way forward

A.M.M. SHAWKAT ALI

FROM the second half of the 1970s until 2003, Professor Nurul Islam has written extensively on the Bangladesh economy. In all his writings, there is strong evidence of practical rather than purely academic insight. It is this quality that makes his thoughts useful, not only to practitioners and policy makers, but also to the academic community.

Looking Outward: Bangladesh in the World Economy (UPL 2004), is the published form of two lectures delivered by Professor Islam at BRAC University and it also includes a third essay titled *The Image of Bangladesh in the Eyes of the International Community*. As explained in the preface, it is derived from and closely linked to the first essay titled *Challenges of Globalisation and Bangladesh*. However, as will be explained later, his third essay: *Thoughts on Indo-Bangladesh Economic Relations* can be linked to chapter 18 of his earlier book titled *Making of A Nation: An Economist's Tale* (UPL 2003).

Challenges of Globalisation and Bangladesh

In this essay, Professor Islam deals with various issues relating to globalisation in the context of Bangladesh. It includes, apart from various aspects of globalisation, (a) the process of Bangladesh's integration in the world economy, (b) trade liberalisation and an assessment of its future directions in terms of growth, inequality, poverty, market access, and standards etc., (c) foreign private investment, (d) intellectual property rights (IPR), and (e) labour migration and overseas remittances.

All of the above issues have been debated and discussed in recent times in Bangladesh in the context of the WTO agreement. However, much of such debate have been more or less scattered or otherwise fragmented. Viewed from this standpoint, Professor Islam's essay fills a much needed gap that currently exists. In particular, his views on IPR indicate the ways to have a fresh look at such important areas as bio-technology in relation to crop seeds and pharmaceuticals.

Overall, the message that Professor Islam gives is that integration into world economy has its risks. The concrete examples he cites are (a) dependence on one or two commodity exports, (b) a large volume of

Book Review

Looking Outward: Bangladesh in the World Economy

by Nurul Islam

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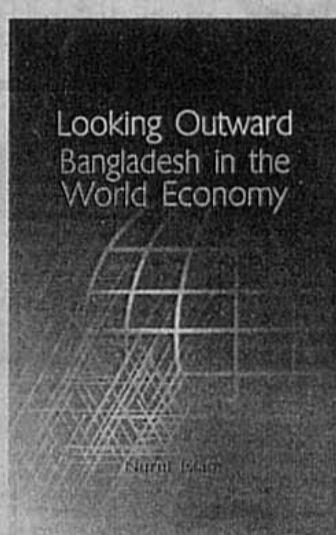
workers' remittance, and (c) a significant and declining flow of uncertain foreign aid. To meet these challenges, he suggests development of substantial flexibility in economic structure and policy instruments to respond to or cushion against externally generated changes. He stresses the need for diversification of the sources of growth and foreign exchange earnings.

In this context, he draws particular attention to the need for upgrading of skills within the government to analyse, monitor, and respond, as well as adjust to the dynamics of world economy. He concludes by saying "Days of amateurs in political leadership have come to an end." Has it really? It is possible to view this remark as a pious wish. But what Professor Islam means is more serious than a pious wish. The risks associated with globalisation will demand a high level of political as well as bureaucratic professionalism without which the risks will far outweigh the intended gains.

Bangladesh in the Eyes of the International Community

This essay deals with the much talked of issue of Bangladesh's image as a Least Developed Country (LDC) and adds two other issues of corruption and governance which are also much discussed in recent times. The striking part of the much debated issues is that these are discussed at depth within a short space and supported by appropriate data grouped into 11 tables.

He begins by asking a pertinent question: when one speaks of the perception relating to Bangladesh's



image, precisely whose perception is one referring to? The international community is not a homogenous commodity and many people abroad may not either know much about or may not have even heard of Bangladesh. He explains this further by saying that his analysis is based on the perceptions among the educated people who are generally interested in international affairs or world events. What has been left unsaid is that perceptions of poor image in respect of Bangladesh are mainly, if not wholly, limited to the aid-giving agencies, multilateral or bilateral.

About the image itself, he refers to the perception that Bangladesh is looked upon as a country haunted by or always in the shadow of famine as well as a country ravaged regularly by floods and cyclones that aggravate the hunger-poverty nexus. One would have expected that he would also refer to Bangladesh's achievement during the mid-nineties in achieving a level of food (cereal) production that is termed as self-sufficiency. Many country strategy documents of major donors acknowledge this.

What he mentions, however, is that perceptions of bad image are not immutable. The positive side he refers to is the remarkable achievement in micro-credit as well as that of ICDDR, These achievements notwithstanding, his concerns relate to the state of governance that is characterised by confrontational politics, inadequate administrative and implementation capacity, limited accountability and transparency, poor state of law and order, and corruption.

All of the above characteristics have been covered by others such as independent think tanks, the donor community and the media in Bangladesh. It should be distinctly

As far as exploring issues go, the issues have not remained uncovered. As for stimulating a debate, these are much debated issues as his endnotes containing explanatory remarks indicate. The intention not to provide answers in fact shows that in most cases he has given useful and constructive suggestions. It is hoped that the policy makers and others having the interest of Bangladesh close to their heart will have enough food for thought in this publication.

understood, however, that Professor Islam brings a fresh outlook on the much debated issue of corruption ranking. Drawing a comparative analysis between a World Bank study and that of Transparency International (TI), Professor Islam categorically states that inter-country comparison is difficult. This is difficult because the estimates following different methodologies and based on different sets of data will indicate (a) the ranks of individual countries are subject to wide margins of error, and (b) the margins of error widely differ among different countries.

The same freshness and analytical acumen are clearly visible in case of other indices of good governance such as voice and accountability, rule of law, political stability and regulatory capacity, and government effectiveness. Drawing on a World Bank study, Professor Islam concludes that in view of indeterminateness of ranking in respect of several indices of governance, inter-country comparisons become difficult, except in case where ranking is unambiguous.

While exploring the ranking methodology followed by TI in case of corruption and the World Bank in respect of good governance, Professor Islam, at the same time, sounds a note of caution that such ranking of countries influence the way in which and the extent to which the rest of the world conducts economic relations with Bangladesh. It affects, he goes on to say, the attitude of external traders and foreign investors towards Bangladesh and the flows of trade and investment. This message is loud and clear and should be noted.

Thoughts on Indo-Bangladesh Economic Relations

This essay provides an analytical and evaluative account of Indo-Bangladesh economic relations which, as stated earlier, was also part of his immediately preceding publication. The issues presented and

analysed include common rivers, bilateral trade, a free trade agreement (FTA), migration of labour to India, and investment cooperation. Professor Islam draws attention to the fact that economic relations between India and Bangladesh are multifaceted ranging over a number of issues. Apart from the issues mentioned above, he refers to transit trade and export of gas. He speaks of the possibility of reducing trade imbalance if transit trade and export of gas issues could be resolved.

His remarkable analytical insight manifests itself when he says that facilitating mutually beneficial agreements will require placement of various components of relationships in a comprehensive framework rather than in isolation from each other. The success in this regard, he adds, will also demand a high level of statesmanship and leadership in both countries. It will also require patience and willingness to compromise and to take a long term view. He further concludes by saying that Bangladesh needs a great of expertise, negotiating skill, and self-confidence -- all necessary in economic negotiations.

In the preface of the publication, Professor Islam states that his intention is to explore issues, to ask questions, and to stimulate debate, rather than provide answers.

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A.M.M. Shawkat Ali, PhD, is a former Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture.

Edwards a welcome choice

ZAHID HOSSAIN writes from Atlanta, Georgia

WITH the announcement of Senator John Edwards as the vice-presidential running mate for the Democratic party presidential candidate Senator John Kerry, the wind of this year's presidential election has started to blow faster.

Now the Democratic party nominations -- both for the presidency and for the post of vice-president will be officially accepted and endorsed at the four-day Democratic Party Convention to be held in Boston late this month.

Senator Edwards as a trial lawyer and a politician has over the years styled himself as a champion of the working class, the son of a mill worker who grew up in the rural south. He opens up a part of rural America that has been very much on the policy agenda of the Democrats. He knows how to talk to them, his language, his speech, his mannerisms, his everything tells them, "I was one of you, I understand you."

The addition of Senator Edwards, and his support from blacks, among other mainstay Democratic constituencies, would put North Carolina into play and is very much expected to bolster Senator Kerry's bid in other southern states, improving his chances of outdoing the abysmal performance in the south of Al Gore, a native Tennessean, during the 2000 presidential election.

The choice of Senator Edwards is also likely to have a powerful effect on the future of the party, giving a platform to a younger Democrat whose selection has been more or less widely appreciated and hailed. He is, it seems, not very different from the Democratic voters he encountered across the country this year during the primaries. He is fully determined for victory against President Bush and prepared to do almost whatever it takes to win.

Born Johnny Reid Edwards on June 10, 1953, in Seneca, South Carolina, he moved to North Carolina to the little town of Robbins, when his father Wallace Edwards took a job there in a textile mill. His mother Bobbie ran a small furniture shop and later worked as a postal employee.

With a degree in textile technology from North Carolina State University and a law degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Senator Edwards is a product of public education, a point he often used to make on the primary campaign trail. He met his wife Elizabeth in law school; they married in 1977, their child Wade was born. They have a daughter, Cate who has graduated from the Princeton University. He has two other younger children -- Emma Claire, 6, and Jack, 4.

By the mid-1980s, Senator Edwards had made a name for himself as a North Carolina trial lawyer representing ordinary people, mostly highly oppressed and deprived clients against giant corporations. His earning scale went quite high. He reported assets worth \$14.3 million to \$44.7 million in his most recent financial disclosure statement.

Senator Edwards was driven to enter politics after his eldest son Wade's death as a teenager in a car accident in 1996. Two years later, in

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his first race, he unseated Senator Lauch Faircloth of North Carolina, then began running for the presidency before his first term was over. In the Presidential primaries, Senator Edwards finished second only to Senator Kerry. For all their friction in the primaries, Senator Kerry and Senator Edwards had two influential Democrats in common as advisers: Senator Edward Kennedy who took Senator Edwards under his wing in the Senate and took an increasingly large role in Senator Kerry's campaign in the primaries; and Bob Shrum, the speech writer and media consultant who worked for both until both men's entry into the primary race led him to drop Edwards as a client last year.

Senator Edwards in his campaign during the primaries offered a legislative agenda that included the promise of a \$1.50 an hour increase in the \$5.15 minimum wage and extended unemployment benefits. Like John Kerry's own platform, it called for rolling back tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans to fuel investments in education and healthcare while keeping tax cuts in place for middle income Americans. He proposed doubling current funding for federal programmes to improve teacher quality in public schools.

The upstart freshman Senator has in fact outlasted more experienced politicians to become John Kerry's running mate as the vice-president. His ability to connect with voters has some party leaders comparing him with former president John F. Kennedy. "There were a lot more experienced people in that race in 1960 too. But the people decided this guy has something special," said Senator Chris Dodd (D-Conn).

Senator Edward Kennedy who has got some liking for Senator John Edwards has also expressed his satisfaction at the selection, saying, "Edwards managed to leapfrog more experienced politicians to the national ticket because of his gift for giving voice to the values of middle class working people, people who have felt left out."

John Frye, a Minister at the South Aiken Presbyterian Church grew up with Edwards in Robbins, North Carolina and remembers his boyhood friend as "a great natural leader." But as a youth, Edwards' ambition seemed to be channelled into athletics. He was equally good at football, basketball, track, and tennis. Edwards' high school Principal Cecil Hackney still recalls the high quality performances of his student.

Senator Edwards' friends and family in Robbins could not wait to give reporters their reaction. "It makes us feel real proud and his mother and I are real humble" said the Senator's father Wallace Edwards. "He has worked hard all his life. He is the type of person America needs in government; because he does not have any agenda for himself."

Former US President Bill Clinton in an exclusive interview with Jim Lehrer on PBS on July 7 also highly lauded the choice of Senator John Edwards by Presidential nominee Senator John Kerry.

Finally Senator Edwards also won attention elsewhere for other qualities. In 2000, People magazine named the boyishly handsome Senator the year's "sexiest politician."

Zahid Hossain is a Senior Research Fellow at the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, Dhaka.

VACANCY NOTICE

Applications are invited from Bangladeshi Nationals to fill up the following positions for a national NGO engaged in Reproductive Health & FPMCH services since 1953.

1. Director Program :

The post is the Chief of Program Division under the direct supervision of Director General of the Organization. He/She will be responsible for supervision of programs in the Headquarters as well as in the Branches and is expected to further improve the existing programs.

Qualification : Master Degree in Social Science or equivalent from any recognized university.

Experience : At least 10 years experience in the following
 • Planning, monitoring & Implementation of programs,
 • Project Development and Budgeting,
 • Proficiency in MS Word and other Application software packages.

Age : Age limit is 55 years.

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Experience : At least 8 years experience in the following. Developing Training curriculum, Budgeting, Training materials, need assessment and evaluation of Training program.

Age : Age limit is up to 45 years.

3. Assistant Director (Women) :

Qualification : Master Degree in Social Science or equivalent from any recognized university.

Experience : 5 years experience in the following.
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Age : Age limit is up to 45 years.

The condition may be relaxed for exceptionally good candidate. Salary is negotiable for all post. No third division/class will be entertained. Must have command in English Language both spoken & written and also update Knowledge in MS word and other Application Software packages.

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Vacancy Announcement

Programme Coordinator (Childhood Blindness)

An international NGO working for the prevention of blindness, education and rehabilitation of the visually impaired seeks applications for a post of **Programme Coordinator (Childhood Blindness)** responsible for leading and managing Bangladesh Childhood Cataract Campaign Project. The Project Coordinator will be a senior position in the organisation reporting to the Country Representative.

The Role : Take lead role in formulating detailed plans for the delivery of the BCO Childhood Blindness programme for Bangladesh. Identify potential partnerships/collaborations with NGOs, government or the private sector which would enhance organisational capacity to fulfill its goal for the Childhood Blindness (CHB) campaign in Bangladesh. Facilitate design and development of detailed project proposals with partners and implementation guidelines through a process involving situation analysis, evaluations of existing programs and feasibility studies in new areas. Facilitate technical support and advice to implementing partners as requested. Ensure that there are systems to monitor and evaluate all its work on CHB and that all programmatic and financial reports and information required at all levels are produced on time and are of a consistently high quality. Assist with the implementation of CHB related medical and social research, as required. Ensure that Bangladesh Country Office program related to Childhood blindness has effective and appropriate representation on national, regional and international fora. Correspond and coordinate with other organizations to share a voice in the formulation of policies.

The Qualifications & Experiences : Public Health (or related) Degree and at least 5 years relevant experience. Project planning and management in the field of public health or development. GOB and NGO Health care structure, network and system in Bangladesh. Financial planning and control at a programme level in development of public health field. Community Mobilisation related to public health or development. Partnership development

Skills (Special Training or Competence) : Fully familiar with project/ programme development process. Training, coaching and mentoring and capacity building. Monitoring/ Performance management. Ability to work under pressure to meet challenging programme targets within deadline. Reporting writing/ documentation. Ability to influence people and assertive negotiation. Team work and lateral cooperation. Financial management. Strong with computer.

Salary and remuneration : Highly competitive compensation package will be offered, depending on qualifications and experiences.

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Office Administrator (OA) will be responsible for the functions related to day to day office administration, house keeping including front office management & PABX operation. OA will manage the mails (in & out), photocopying, faxing of documents, Vehicle, Electrical & IT Equipments, Furniture & Fixtures of the office. OA will also procure & manage Store & Inventories and supervise the work of Office Attendants and the drivers.

Qualifications & Experiences : Graduation with 5 years working experience, sound knowledge in general office administration, vehicle management, maintenance of Electrical & IT Equipments and trouble shooting. Comprehensive knowledge on commonly used programmes of Microsoft environment including Photoshop, Acrobat Writer, Bangla Software etc.

Skills : Excellent oral communication skill in Bangla & English, excellent inter-personal skill and ability to work in a team, ability to take strategic decision and work under pressure, confidentiality & discretion, self motivation and initiative, ability to prioritise the issues & works

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The organization is an Equal opportunity employer and encourages applications from all sectors of the community. However, applications from qualified female candidates are highly encouraged

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 Candidates of the age of 30 years or below, possessing degree in MBA or Master in Economics, Commerce or Management degree from a reputed institution with two First Division / Class and 2/3 years experience in Credit & Marketing preferably in Leasing / Bank with proven track record in marketing of Financial product will be eligible to apply.
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