Table 3: Regional diversification of industry: Possible areas of growth

Region	District	Activity
1	Dinajpur, Rangpur, Gaibandha, Jaipurhat	Agro-processing
2	Bogra, Sirajganj, Pabna, Jamalpur, Tangail and Manikganj	Light manufacturing
3	Nawabganj, Rajshahi, Natore and Kushtia	Agro-processing
4	Jhenidah, Jessore and Khulna	Mix of agro-processing & light manufacturing
5	Munshiganj, Brahmanbaria, Comilla and Feni	Light manufacturing

tentative, are based on a preliminary analysis of some of the possible determinants of comparative advantages in various regions such as crop suitability, access to markets and infrastructural endowments.

These regions have relatively high degrees of market accessibility compared to other parts of the country, and hence, are likely to have larger demand for their manufactured products. The suggested specializations for the regions follow from other factors, notably the current and expected economic base for industry.

For example, two regions in the western part of Bangladesh stand out in terms of their agricultural potential. Crop suitability indices constructed for different districts in Bangladesh have the highest values for two clusters of districts: a) eight contiguous districts in the north-west corner of Bangladesh, including almost the whole of the old districts of Dinjapur and Rangpur, and the district of Jamalpur on the other side of the Jamuna; and b) the districts of Meherpur, Chuadanga, Jhenaidah, and Jessore in western Bangladesh. The old district of Rajshahi in north-west Bangladesh also has good agricultural potential.

These districts also have a high density of secondary roads; indeed some of them have the highest secondary road density in the country. Another noteworthy fact is the larger than average land holding sizes in the north-western region of the country suggesting a greater scope for contract farming as a basis for agro-processing industries.

These factors suggest that the districts of Dinajpur, Rangpur, Gaibandha, and Jaipurhat (identified as Region 1) and the districts of Nawabganj, Rajshahi, Natore and Kushtia (Region 3) could be good locations for a primarily agro-processing based industrialization.

Region 2 (the districts of Bogra, Sirajganj and Pabna on the western side of the Jamuna river and Jamalpur, Tangail and Manikganj on the eastern side) could focus on light manufacturing although there may be some scope for agro-processing activities in these areas as well. Bogra, for example, has some tradition in light engineering products, and Pabna in textiles.

Region 5 (the districts of Munshiganj, Bramanbaria, Comilla and Feni), which account for a large part of the Dhaka-Chittagong corridor, and which have a dense road network as well as a relatively good access to electricity, is another strong candidate for substantial expansion of light manufacturing activities.

Finally, Region 4 (south-western districts of Jhenidah, Jessore, and Khulna), may focus on a mix of agro-processing and light manufacturing.

As these regions emerge as important centres of industry, the current concentrations of industry, i.e., the Dhaka and Chittagong belts may transform into centres of higher-end industrial activity which require a supply of highly skilled labour and highly educated professional, technical and managerial people who, for various reasons, may want to be located near the largest cities. Less demanding light manufacturing activities may then relocate to the new regions.

This note has made a beginning in highlighting the regional pattern of industrialization in Bangladesh, and made some tentative suggestions about regions which may be the focus of a strategy of regionally balanced industrialization. Further analytic work is required to answer many questions not addressed by this note. Such work will help identify operational interventions that may promote greater regional balance in industrialization without falling into the trap of artificially promoting industrialization disregarding comparative advantages.

Many years ago, we fought hard against regional disparity within a united Pakistan. It is somewhat paradoxical, given this history, that we are turning a blind eye towards regional disparities within Bangladesh. It is time to change this.

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