BANGLADESH HARVARD CONFERENCE

Bangladesh in the 21st Century

Dr. Syed Saad Andaleeb introduces the conference held at Harvard University

THE dream behind the *Bangladesh in the 21st Century* conference at Harvard University was to bring together scholars, practitioners, students, and well-wishers as a community to contemplate the opportunities and challenges facing the aspiring nation -- Bangladesh.

The response was overwhelming. About ninety papers were submitted from four continents covering topics as diverse as foreign policy and infrastructure to health care, education, politics, and even shrimp culture. From the submitted papers, about sixty were ultimately chosen for presentation.

It was apparent from the deliberations that Bangladesh has made remarkable progress with economic growth reaching almost 7% in FY2006-2007. This has been termed as the Bangladesh Paradox in spite of the country's unstable political environment and widespread poverty.

On the other hand, Bangladesh has also had to weather many a storm: civil unrest, assassinations, culture of corruption, incompetence, strong egos, an identity crisis, external pressures, economic downturns, debilitated institutions, weak infrastructure, widespread poverty and related challenges since its cataclysmic birth.

For challenges of such mammoth proportions the solutions are neither easy nor immediate, although there was a positive aura at the conference that progress is possible on each front.

To move forward, Bangladesh needs visionary leadership, with the right dreams, supported by a selfless team of dedicated and able individuals, all tuned into the same marching song to lift the nation's spirit, pride, and sense of purpose where both individual and community needs are addressed. At the conference, a confluence of many hearts and minds interested in the future of Bangladesh, there was a felt need to kindle the desire in those who are able and willing, including the Bangladesh diaspora, to help steer the nation to more vibrant shores through collective efforts and contributions in a spirit of partnership.

The conference at Harvard University is now behind us and we must look forward as we bring in more stakeholders into the process of identifying the challenges and doing something meaningful and constructive about it to help shape the future of Bangladesh in a globalising world.

Here, we reproduce five of the papers presented to give Forum's readers a flavour of the conference and to showcase some of the innovative ideas and research that was on display.

Syed Saad Andaleeb *is Professor, Pennsylvania State University, Editor, Journal of Bangladesh Studies, and President of Bangladesh Development Initiative.*