

## Women's worth grossly undervalued

*A national loss and denial of their rightful place*

THE socio-cultural curse of widespread discrimination including violence against women is rooted in the fact that their economic worth remains mostly undervalued at best and not valued at all at worst. Even in cases where women are paid for their work, it still is highly inequitable compared to what their male counterparts get. More demeaning to the women's intrinsic worth is the substantial underestimation of the role in GDP for the failure to reflect the unaccounted for value of women's contribution to national economy.

We often take pride in food self-sufficiency feeding 161 million from what used to be imported food – dependent 71 million at birth. The magic wand behind it is this: Out of 23 steps from plantation to the sale of paddy, women perform as many as 17. As though men are eligible as farmers women are outcasts. This is both an issue of non-recognition as well as habitual patriarchal reluctance to estimate their contribution to agriculture including horticulture, pisciculture and poultry and livestock farming. Add to these, their mainstream house-keeping role without which nothing would move. Put together, the stupendous value addition made by women to national economy and their fuller potential for social good need to be recognised coupled with monetization of their contribution.

These will have multiple positive effects by way of enhancing dignity and status of women, reorienting political, cultural and social attitudes to be women-friendly and elevating the discourse on women's rights from the rhetoric to the substantive.

## BIMSTEC HQ in Dhaka

*Take forward multi-country initiatives*

A decade after its formation, BIMSTEC, which stands for 'The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation' and encompasses five nations from South and South East Asia, a permanent secretariat has been set up in Dhaka. Experts are lauding it as a major step in realising the vision of "shared development" across 14 sectors spanning from trade and investment, communication, energy, poverty alleviation and counter terrorism. What is of import is to take forward the initiative as member countries' governments are on board with the scheme.

Needless to say, many of the problems of development are shared across member states. In terms of communication, direct road links spanning from Myanmar to India and beyond would greatly increase cross border trade to the tune of billions. Bangladesh, as the gateway located strategically between the east and the west would greatly benefit from such an arrangement. Terrorism is a security threat that plagues all the nations involved in the BIMSTEC initiative and better sharing of intelligence could help maintain peace from a regional perspective.

Investment, particularly foreign direct investment in the areas of energy and infrastructure are prime areas of interest for all member countries. Technical cooperation in these areas to develop the region as a whole will undoubtedly be a welcome move and BIMSTEC, it is hoped, will play a pivotal role in this area. We wholeheartedly welcome the founding of the secretariat here in Dhaka and look forward to it playing a constructive role in expediting development in the region.

## An algorithm to decipher

MOZAMMEL HAQUE RANJU

EXPATRIATE Bangladeshis have sent home USD 1.16 billion in Aug, 22% less than they did in July. In July, the remittance inflow was USD 1.49 billion, an all-time high.

Let's look at another group of wage earners at our apparel sector. What we see is the influx of Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans and some Koreans or Chinese – mostly in the management levels. Look at the top posts of a major garment factory or of a leading trading house – all we see the expatriates holding the key decision making positions.

If you look at the salaries they are getting – you would be baffled. The salary structure is in line with Bangladeshi Managers. I have many friends working in different positions in these top ranking garment factories, trading, buying, sourcing or liaison offices operating in Bangladesh. In black and white the expatriate managers are getting meager sum of money like we natives get. But in reality they are getting more than anyone could ever imagine. In reality they pay taxes base on that but they draw a hefty amount (the balance package) through other channels. These are separate bank accounts they are maintaining abroad and the payments are made diligently. We have amongst us some unscrupulous (if not notorious) law enforcing agencies, bank officials, audit bodies - who eagerly come forward to aid them to get away with this in exchange of a few bucks.

For example, an expat manager, on an average, could well take out a salary of at least 40-50 times more than that of a worker working in a garment factory (minimum wage is set at Tk. 5300.00 for a garment entry level worker last year). I believe we are no longer the toddlers in the global garment manufacturing trade and now there is enough expertise available around us and within ourselves. We no longer depend on the expats anymore for promoting us.

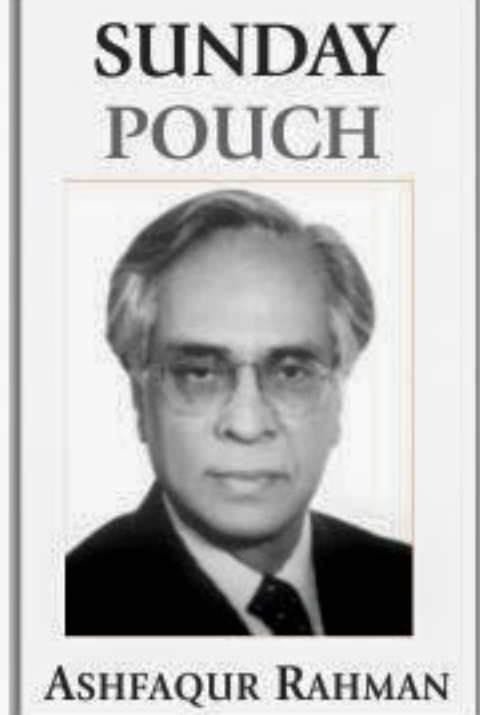
The developing countries are sending back our men in numbers with a view to shed at least whatsoever coinage that would make job opportunities for their own nationals. On the other hand we are giving these foreigners a free ride at the expense of our sons' bright future on our own soil. We let our money to be ciphered away unchallenged. The expats are outnumbering us on every sphere of our apparel sector. If this continues unemployment would hit hard our socio economic factors. The legislative body should start at it now. They should comprehensively check all these anomalies; scrutinize their credentials. All work permits should be checked prior to their renewals, remuneration and other factors.

Our apparel sector needs a proper system for employing foreign managers.

The writer is a marketing professional in an Apparel Manufacturing Unit.

# BLUE ECONOMY

## Overtaking the West by 2050?



ASFAQUR RAHMAN

Bay. That will push Bangladesh at one big go to shoot further up and run past some of the lower ranking western countries who now are positioned at the top twenty of the global list of the world biggest economies. We can therefore predict that by 2050 Bangladesh will be a developed country. We, however, do not agree that by 2041 we can achieve that stature as suggested by our government.

But all this is in the realm of pure speculations. However as we discover the extent and substance of our blue economy the opaque nature of this prognostication will be made clearer. All this may come to naught if we are unable to improve our political state of affairs or we are not faced with a series of major natural disasters and are unable to overcome these adversities. It is therefore important for us to first understand what we mean by 'blue economy' as for many of us it is a new term.

A Belgian businessman Gunter Pauli about thirty years back began a project to fund 100 of the best inspired technologies that would affect the economy of a country while sustainably providing basic human needs. These are potable water, food, jobs and habitable shelter. He discovered 340 innovations that could be bundled into systems that function the way ecosystems do. Gunter then wrote a book called the 'Blue economy: 10 years – 100 innovations – 100 million jobs'. Based on the thesis, blue economy was broken down into things individuals can do every day to live a happier, healthier and more sustainable life. It talks about a path of blue living, making use of resources from the land and sea and the capabilities each one of us holds within. In essence the principles of a blue economy respond to basic needs of all with what we have.

The catch phrase of a blue economy is 'it is a different way of designing business by using the resources available in a country in cascading streams'. So the waste of one product becomes the input to create new cash flow. This creates jobs, builds social capital and rising income while saving the environment. Thus in any country which uses blue economy waste does not exist. A byproduct becomes a source of a new product. Wealth there means diversity. Nature provides entrepreneurs who do more with less. For example in a blue economy gravity is the main source of energy. Solar energy is the next renewable fuel. Here inno-

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vation takes place each time the country moves up the ladder of wealth. In many ways blue economy is a transition from a product based economy to a system based economy.

Blue economy is essentially a design theory and is most useful in finding out ways to exploit our ocean related natural resources like oil, gas, flora, fauna, minerals as well as using the power of tides, under sea currents, the geomorphology of the sea terrain, etc. But in all this we must pay attention to the environment.

It must be remembered that more than 40% of the global population lives within 100 km of the coast. Thirteen of the world's 20 mega cities lie along the coast. Nearly 700 million live in low lying coastal areas less than 10 m above sea level. The livelihood of 12 % of the world population depends on fisheries and aqua culture sector. But we humans have the abhorrent habit of using marine and aquatic resources as if they were endless. It is imperative that we stop using our seas and oceans as a waste pool. This is accelerating the loss of precious biodiversity also. Over 80% of 232 marine eco-regions have been attacked by invasive species.

So in Bangladesh when we start exploiting our marine resources, we should go in there with the knowledge that our Bay of Bengal hold many treasures that we also need to conserve. There are over 23 million people who feed from the coastal belt alone. Now with the new acquisition of 1, 18,813 sq km of

territorial sea, 200 miles of exclusive economic zone and sovereign rights in the sea bed extending to 354 nautical miles from Chittagong port, there is a tremendous big treasure chest there for Bangladesh to look forward to.

It was therefore most appropriate and well-timed for the Prime Minister of our country to take the initiative and convene an international expert meeting in Dhaka a few days back on ways to explore and reap the benefits in real terms by using blue economy designs. The government has just sent our State Minister for Foreign Affairs to Samoa to attend for the first time an international conference where sustainable developments of small states are being discussed. We must learn quickly how we must start investing in this treasure chest in order to accrue more wealth and bring prosperity to our poor coastal people without hurting the environment.

As we learn about our blue economy we must not forget about our green economy which is on land and how we can apply the principles of blue economy to its sustainable growth. Together we must work in a circular economy to push Bangladesh into the realm of prosperity. 2050 is just 36 years away. We don't have much time in hand. It is time to abandon political calisthenics and fruitless political posturing and work full steam towards achieving the goals of a blue economy and our green economy. Imagine how quickly the 'bottomless basket' will turn out to be a 'basket of cornucopia'.

The writer is a former Ambassador and is a commentator on current issues. E-Mail : ashfaq303@gmail.com

## Why is Iraq in this quagmire?

RUBY AMATULLAH

AFTER eleven years of bloodshed, violence and dysfunctional state in Iraq, since the American invasion in March 2013, finally the threat coming from radical Sunni group 'Islamic State' woke the Western leaders up to the reality that the country needs an inclusive power-sharing political arrangement among the three main ethnic groups – Shiia 60%, Kurds 21% and Sunni 18% – in order to keep Iraq together.

However, if this realization had come 11 years sooner this long ordeal could have largely been avoided. Knowing that these three groups, in spite of their unequal sizes, have their respective connections with the regional powers and interests America should have realized that simple majority rule would never have worked in Iraq. The only way the country – with a long difficult history full of sectarian conflicts – could be kept together if all three groups were made interdependent and indispensable regarding governance. It was unlikely at that time that Shiia-Sunni communities would come together on their own to share power. Therefore the Occupier had a greater role and responsibility in establishing a permanent arrangement so that Iraq could stabilize, integrate and prosper.

There were many blunders in Iraq; the most critical among them was the very extensive 'de-Baathification' process. Most of the Baath party members were Sunni and they had run the country since the time of the Ottoman Empire. Not only were the top people removed but also anyone that worked during Saddam's rule were fired from their jobs. This was a strategic blunder when the reconstruction of the country remained the top priority and the services of most of the Baath members were essential. If the top masterminds were taken off, the rest that took orders could have been rehabilitated and integrated into the system, as was done in the cases of Japan and Germany during the post-War period. It was a wrong to think that Shiia majority rule could manage the country. This unintelligent policy humiliated and marginalized the entire Sunni community and they went on the offensive.

Furthermore, holding election in such volatile situation, without building a consensus among the major rival groups was another blunder. It was not difficult to foresee that a Constituent Assembly, overwhelmingly Shiia would lead to the Sunni boycott, and then the Shiia rule would be untenable. Ever since the Sunni boycott of the Assembly and their rejection of the government, there have been prolonged bloodshed and violence that finally led to this present crisis with the Islamic State. It is expected that many of the 300,000 Sunni Iraqi army that was disbanded by the Coalition Provisional Authority [CPA order no 2] as part of the de-Baathification policy in 2003 later joined the Islamic State and now has become a humongous problem. It was an expensive mistake to sack 300,000 professionally trained military men back home with arms, but no jobs or future.

Another blunder that followed was to refuse the Iranian proposal in 2003: Iran reversed its longstanding role as an adversary to become an ally of America and now offering

its full cooperation. Geographically, this should have been taken as a golden opportunity as Iran is flanked by Iraq and Afghanistan. If Iran was made an ally at that time perhaps the fierce fighting between the forces of Muqtada al-Sadr's Shiia group and the US forces and other skirmishes could be avoided saving tens of thousands of lives.

A better relationship between America and Iraq could lead to a huge windfall but Israel has ruined it all both for America as well as for the region. The Israeli powerful lobby that infiltrated the entire American decision making process has been working like a parasite. Now the giant is on the ground obeying orders from its tiny master.

No one gained in Iraq after the invasion -- neither the Iraqis nor the American taxpayers -- except the military-industrial complex and its multinational contractors like Halliburton and Bechtel and their local cronies and the terrorists and extremists.

The ultimate responsibility rests on the Iraqis. They should not have wasted it over Shiia-Sunni power struggles. After the invasion the Iraqis had a legitimate claim on the USA to help rebuild their country and they would see that the superpower was obliged.



Everything that could go wrong did go wrong in Iraq under American occupation. Bob Woodward's writing has revealed that the real trouble was that the Bush administration was deeply divided, uncoordinated and inconsistent about Iraq. The right hand did not either agree or know what the left was doing. The most mind boggling fact is that there was no post-invasion plan for Iraq. The administration had this naive mindset that after the UN takeover America's responsibility would largely be over. As soon as the UN arrived in Baghdad a bomb blast killed the UN top personnel and the UN packed bags and left. America got stuck with Iraq for the next nine years.

Iraq after 23-year Saddam's tyranny, 8-year bloody war with Iran, and 350,000 Shiia slaughtered, 100,000 Kurds gassed, and 50,000 children starved to death became an inferno with sectarian tension. American leadership remains answerable to the world why it aggravated the sectarian conflicts even more through its most irresponsible handling and as to why the superpower failed to leave the country better than it found Iraq at the time of invasion?

The writer is Executive Director, US based Justice, Peace and Progress. E-mail : rubyamatullah@yahoo.com

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### 3L for women empowerment

Christine Lagarde, managing director at International Monetary Fund (IMF), has recently put forward a 3L approach towards ensuring women's empowerment around the globe. The 3Ls are for- learning, labour, and leadership. She stressed the need for educating girls to make them active for performing economic activities. Labour enables women to flourish and achieve their true potential. Christine pleaded for ensuring equal pay for equal work for women. She also mentioned that discrimination in pay and status has to be eliminated. Finally, women must be given the opportunity to demonstrate their leadership ability because leadership enables women to rise and fulfil their innate abilities and talents.

While describing her 3L approach for women empowerment, Christine Lagarde put emphasis on enhancing economic role of women in a rapidly changing world for accomplishing development goals and economic emancipation. Bangladesh should follow this 3L approach to empower its women. Professor M Zahidul Haque Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka

### Reinstall retractable spikes on city roads

Your front page report, "People obey law, influentials break," published on 2nd September, with photos, is the classic example of the popular saying, "might is right." Small wonder Bangladesh has become a land of lawlessness. We have established 'democracy' at least on roads and highways! We must use the retractable spikes; the sooner the better. The earlier maker of retractable spikes may collaborate with BUET's mechanical engineering faculty and solve the problems that led to its withdrawing.

A passenger Dhaka

### Rehabilitate city beggars

The other day I got into a tempo which was going to Gulshan-1 from Mohammadpur. When we reached Mohakhali, a minor boy approached the passengers of our tempo; he was naked. Maybe he was naked with the intention of getting sympathy from the public. A woman from our tempo gave him some money. He then left and got into another vehicle for begging. In a one-hour journey by a public vehicle in Dhaka, one would have to face at least 10 to 20 beggars at different traffic signals and bus stops.

Beggars are a big problem in the cities. And the number of beggars is increasing ominously. The syndicates of beggars are using novel techniques to make people give money. Children are being used in large numbers in this despicable profession. Some syndicates steal children and impair or deform their limbs for begging purpose. The government should take measures to rehabilitate the beggars so they can have a better life and the city dwellers can get some relief from their onslaught.

Md Zoned Emran On e-mail

### Comments on news analysis, "Patients left in anarchy," published on September 8, 2014

Zia

Nowhere in the world it happens except in Bangladesh. How come doctors and nurses stop working by calling strikes? They are supposed to look after the patients, which should be their one and only duty. The government has been making lots of policies these days. They should make one first for the medical professionals so that no one dares to call a strike at hospital.

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### "1965 Indo-Pak War: Busting the myth" (September 8, 2014)

M. Akram Khann

I am a veteran of the 1965 war. I served with many Bengali officers and men before, during and after the war. I never came across any doubt expressed about their courage, bravery, dedication and overall military prowess. I can say with conviction that my Bengali colleagues could match the best in the world then.

Rakib

I was attending a course at Quetta Infantry School back in 1988. I discussed the Pakistani concept "The defense of the East lies in the West" with my instructor. It was a concept based on territorial gain meaning gaining territory in the West would give them better bargaining capability since it was difficult for Pakistan to build up a formidable force in the Eastern front. In fact, they could not tell me openly that the security of the then East Pakistan was a second priority to them. I understood that. Thanks for this short article.