Chapter 5

Nation Building and Development
Bangabandhu’s Economic Philosophy: A Brief Review of *The Unfinished Memoirs*

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1. Background

This paper intends to review Bangabandhu’s “economic philosophy” linked with well-being, equity and justice to the society and the state as well. It briefly analyzes the economic philosophy reflected in some cases or facts embedded or quoted in the book titled *The Unfinished Memoirs*, the autobiography of the country’s founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Exploring the autobiography, one can comprehend how it sheds a spectrum of light on the ground realities of Bangladesh to be an independent country later on through the nine-month-long war of liberation in 1971. Reviewing the book, one can realize and understand how Bangabandhu shaped his turbulent political life through a great struggle in those tumultuous days to establish the rights of the people and the state as well. Despite his troubled journey, Bangabandhu always envisaged that the Bengali people would be free from different forms of subjugation and exploitation in the time ahead. A brief review of *The Unfinished Memoirs* unveils the developmental or economic philosophy of Bangabandhu during the stipulated time periods—from a young politician at his school days to becoming a hero and then an unchallenged leader of the Bengalis in the 1960s.
In the backdrop of the paper, it will be pertinent to explain how the notebooks of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman got published as a book. Bangabandhu wrote the four notebooks during his incarceration from 1967 to 1969, during the period of "Agartala Conspiracy Case". While in prison, he gave the four notebooks to his nephew Sheikh Fazlul Haq Moni and a newspaper editor. The notebooks were lost as both were killed and it remained untraced for many years. Sheikh Hasina, Bangabandhu’s daughter, found those notebooks after three decades of her father’s death and she, with the assistance of her younger sister of Sheikh Rehana, took initiative to transcribe the notebooks to get them published as a book. Finally the book *The Unfinished Memoirs* by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was published by The University Press Limited (UPL) in 2012. Bangabandhu, also known as a people’s person, penned the notebooks with straightforwardness, keenness, meticulousness, and no chopping of words in unfolding events and people. The review of this book has been done from the viewpoint of an enthralled reader, not from that of an able critic because of the limited aptitude.

*The Unfinished Memoirs*, also termed as no-holds-barred account, represents the historical events of political, economic, social, cultural and religious importance and personages that shaped Bangabandhu’s political life and times. It describes the nature of politics and politicians of that time. With Bangabandhu’s effective and efficient leadership and guidance, the country fought its glorious Liberation War in 1971. Because of his struggles, dreams, and dedicated activities, which are mirrored throughout his political life, thoughts, and struggles, Bengali people always consider him to be a larger-than-life personality. Last but not the least, his book *The Unfinished Memoirs* portrays the early life of Bangladesh and it widens the scope of this analysis. This paper attempts to analyze different activities of Bangabandhu described in *The Unfinished Memoirs* using the economic lens, for which an analysis gap exists.

2. Rationale of the Study

*The Unfinished Memoirs* captures three tiers of anecdotes of Bangabandhu’s life span until the 1960s: young boy, devoted activist, and the leader. A review of the book reveals that the economic or
developmental philosophy of Bangabandhu is deeply rooted in the political philosophy and these are complementary to each other. While reading the book, one can find a spectrum of political activities integrated with Bangabandhu's life span which are partially aimed to meet up the economic demands of the society and the state. Therefore, political activities or agendas created economic anecdotes, which now demand further explanations. Anecdotes, either political or economic, found during the three tiers of Bangabandhu's life span laid the building blocks of his political philosophy and wider intellectual discussions are found on this paradigm. But the least discussion is evident on economic philosophy though there exists economic rationale behind many elements or events of his political domain. Keeping this rationale in mind, this study attempts to review some of the anecdotes, extracting from Bangabandhu's book *The Unfinished Memoirs*, using the lens of economic paradigm.

3. Economic Philosophy: Anecdotes from the *Unfinished Memoirs*

This section analyzes some events to lay the foundation of the main concern, i.e., economic philosophy of Mujib's anecdotes. Since his early days, Bangabandhu had been conscious of his own responsibilities towards the society and the country. He tried to do the right things in a right and daunting manner for bringing wellbeing for the society. His altruistic devotion to and efforts for the society and the country have shaped the economic aspect of his activities aimed at ensuring wellbeing for the mass and disadvantaged people. This requires further economic explanations from societal and state perspectives and this will be done here in the form of economic incentives. The analysis can begin with the mention of an example of *Muslim Seba Samiti* cited in the book *The Unfinished Memoirs*. Kazi Abdul Hamid, lodging teacher of Bangabandhu, formed this *Samiti* in 1937 with a view to provide assistance to the students coming from poor families. The assistance included stipend, financial assistance, and assistance to cover educational expenses such as examination fee. Soon after the death of his teacher, Bangabandhu took over the responsibility of the *Samiti* and ran it for a long time. During that time, he collected rice from rich Muslim families, sold it to the market, and then disbursed the
money to the poor students. However, sometimes he forced the rich families if they did not agree. This activity has some clear-cut economic implications. First of all, it indicates selfless devotion of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman towards the poor students who were marginalized in terms of continuation of education. Later on, this was reflected in his speech just before the election of 1970 that “nobody should be deprived of education due to poverty”. In addition, such redistribution of existing resources of the society is a kind of progressive tax system and is supposed to help bring justice to the poor and create equal opportunities for education. Such redistribution of income has a theoretic approach—it is positively associated with wellbeing given the resource constraint. More of such redistribution creates more wellbeing in the society in the absence of corruption. It will be pertinent here to clarify how more wellbeing is generated through redistribution. In this connection, the example of the utility of money can be mentioned which states that the utility of a unit of money is higher to the poor than to the rich. Therefore, redistribution of resources from the rich to the poor helps to create more wellbeing in a given society. This economic philosophy and perspective could help to reduce inequality and inter-class division through establishing justice for the marginalized people.

One event at the age of 18 years of Bangabandhu can explain the way he did this. In 1938 when Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq and HS Suhrawardy visited Gopalganj, Bangabandhu organized the welcome event in such a way as to highlight the miserable condition of the local people before them. This reflects his commitment towards bringing collective benefits, rather than his individual gains. A concept of economics—social or collective benefit is embedded in the narrative of the event highlighted above.

Another case that can be cited from the book is that of Bengal famine in 1943. In his writings, Bangabandhu expressed the view that the Bengal famine of 1943 was not caused by shortage of food; rather, it was the outcome of the practice of hoarding of goods with the intention of selling at higher prices in future. Similar was the findings of noble laureate Amartya Sen in his book titled “Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation”, where he mentioned that the Bengal famine was artificially created. Bangabandhu wrote this in his diaries long before
Sen’s publication. The problem of distribution during that time is also thought of as a causal element of famine in addition to higher prices of goods, debts, hunger, black market, etc.

Bangabandhu met HS Suhrawardy, the then Civil Supply Minister and upon his request, he took necessary steps on an urgent basis to establish a big “Civil Supply Department”, open the “Control” shop and run Longorkhanas in every village. Bangabandhu himself participated in such relief activities directly and observed the sufferings of common people. In that context, he attempted to hold a conference in South Bengal so that leaders could observe the situation and develop ideas on how to tackle the situation. Implications of this from an economic perspective include a range of views. For example, the occurrence of famine in Bengal in 1943 was not caused by food shortage. Rather, multiple factors mentioned above contributed to such famine. More specifically, the lack of distributive justice was evident during the famine. Therefore, famine could be avoided if there was justice in the society. His write up also indicates that businessmen did not maintain ethics though business ethics was important to reduce the sufferings of the commons. Self-dedication and motivation can also play a role during such a crisis. As Bangabandhu had a good relationship with HS Suhrawardy, people advised Bangabandhu to invite Suhrawardy along with some Muslim League leaders to see the distressed conditions of the locality. They tried to do so with the hope of getting more relief. Bangabandhu capitalized the social capital, which is a very strong element during the time of crisis, through inviting Suhrawardy. This incidence also shows that coordination and cooperation (i.e., reciprocity-based kinship relationships) act as a crisis coping strategy.

In addition, activities of Bangabandhu during the communal clashes of 1947 prove that he had a secular mindset. This is why he persistently took efforts to ease the riots, and save lives irrespective of race, class, and religion, and demanded the release of all political prisoners, implying his spirit of establishing non-communal peace and shared wellbeing (i.e., secularism and non-communalism). Moreover, Bangabandhu hated conspiratorial politics of any kind, opportunist politicians, unfit leadership, unprincipled leaders, and cowardly politicians as they never work for national development and they do more harm than good for the country.
people. Activities involved with such kinds of politics and politicians are not only detrimental to individual and society, but also to the state. Such rationale motivated Bangabandhu to emphasize on strong and dedicated leadership as prerequisites to national development. Bangabandhu’s spirit of establishing secularism and non-communalism is also evident in his lifelong struggles to establish social parity and reciprocity-based kinship relationships in times of crises.

Regarding the global peace perspective, the book reveals that Bangabandhu opposed the signing of military pact between Pakistan and the USA in 1954 as his ideology was in favour of formulating a neutral and independent foreign policy and against the Cold War divide. Similarly, Bangabandhu had a strong belief in the coexistence and mutual tolerance of different identity groups. The belief in such ideologies is also closely intertwined with economic justice. He believed in establishing global and non-communal peace as it is imperative to ensure the economic welfare of the people of a country. Aside from the political freedom of the masses, he urged the people of a newly liberated state of Pakistan to come forward building the country and devote all the resources and labor for ensuring the economic freedom of the masses. Therefore, concepts of resource economics for building the country and establishing rights and wellbeing of the masses from the distributive justice are the true reflections of Bangabandhu’s economic philosophy.

Here, some quotations can be explained along with their implications and link with Bangabandhu’s developmental philosophy. The quotation “If leaders do mistake while leading, it incurs huge costs for the public” has an important implication. It helps to realize how cost/loss is associated with political decisions undertaken by leaders. It also implies that ideal leadership is imperative for overall national development. Another quote like “Those who work do few mistakes, but those who don’t work can make no mistake” encourages the people to engage in work. This also implies that all should work for progress. The concept of learning-by-doing (i.e., the practice of the error-learning method) is embedded in the quote. People can acquire excellence through learning-by-doing. Bangabandhu put more emphasis on practical engagements in the work. Bangabandhu stated, “People have the right to protest any kind of unjust
activity done by a leader”, which means people have the right to protest if leaders commit a mistake. He further quoted, “Autocracy arises in the absence of strong opposition”. This proves that Bangabandhu was in favour of a strong opposition as it is important for development, and democracy cannot function without strong opposition. The next quotation that can be mentioned was: “Well-being of the people comes at the cost of sacrifice by the political leaders”. It was mentioned many times in The Unfinished Memoirs that if someone wanted to be a leader, a mindset of sacrifice is essential; otherwise, no good could be done for the commons.

The quotation: “An independent country without freedom of public opinion is a matter of distress” means that the freedom of public opinion should be valued. Public opinion contributes to national development and helps reduce distress. The non-communal spirit of Bangabandhu lies in his writings: “All we are human being irrespective of religions”. Many more quotes of Bangabandhu, e.g., “When the ruler himself becomes exploiter or helps exploiter to exploit, it brings melancholies to the public”, “Incongruous political leaders try to maximize their own interest, rather than the interest of the country”, “Unity requires leaders belonging to same ideology” and “Leadership in the absence of qualities like integrity, accountability, empathy, humanity, resilience, vision, influence, and positivity destroys the economy” are integrated with his political and economic or developmental philosophy. That is why a good or ideal political leadership is important for development. He also mentioned a lesson that he had learnt from his father Sheikh Lutfar Rahman: “Sincerity of purpose and honesty of purpose”. Bangabandhu never forgot this lesson. That is why he in one case got justice. He was titled as “Peacekeeper instead of Peacebreaker”.

After the India-Pakistan divide, there were more sufferings of the masses-increased corruption, food shortage, looting of industries, discrimination, no or least care provided to the then East Pakistan. Karachi was the capital city despite being the minority. There was significant discrimination in job placement including the military and the foreign currency of East Pakistan was used to build industries in West Pakistan. All these led to frustration among people in East Pakistan; they demanded exploitation-free society and economic development. Bangabandhu struggled to free the people from subjugation.
Reflecting on Bangabandhu’s vision of equity and justice, one needs to understand the meaning of equity, justice, and the difference between equity and equality. Equality basically means equal opportunities provided to all. But Bangabandhu emphasized on equity which has deeper insight rather than equality in the sense that when equality is talked about, it means varying opportunities should be provided depending on the needs. It means that Bangabandhu believed in the need-based assessment. He said that opportunity should be there but for those who need it most. Previously, it was believed that equality was the best; however, sometimes equality cannot open up opportunities for all. In that case, justice is more reflected in equity than equality. In order to ensure distributive justice, equity is needed. Here, he brought up the case of providing subsidies. In his view, more benefits would be achieved if disadvantaged segments of the population are provided with more subsidies rather than the rich segment. This implies that fruits or outcomes of any action should be distributed in an equitable manner. This was the philosophy of the father of the nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who aimed to establish justice for the poor, the whole society, and the state as well on the basis of equity.

4. Conclusion

The brief review of the book The Unfinished Memoirs covers a period starting from his school days to his rising as a hero and then becoming an unchallenged leader of the Bengalis. In his book, he described not only the political situation but also the nature of politics and politicians at his time. The spectrum of his involvements with politics and political activities also implied some economic rationales. Despite being a politician, Bangabandhu hated conspiratorial politics of any kind, opportunist politicians, unfit leadership, unprincipled leaders, and cowardly politicians as they are detrimental to national development. Therefore, the ideology of the politics that Bangabandhu owned was coined within the ideology of development, which requires strong and dedicated leadership.

This study is an effort to understand his political activities and events from an economic lens. Bangabandhu’s activities quoted in the book prove that he did such activities as a part of his responsibilities towards society and the state. His selfless devotion to the society and the country can be
thought of as an instrument for the creation of collective wellbeing. Bangabandhu with his secular and non-communal mindset always struggled for the wellbeing of the marginalized, deprived, and oppressed ones. He also struggled to establish human rights, economic rights, political rights, justice and peace, and social security. He also proved that coordination and cooperation (i.e., reciprocity-based kinship relationships) are pre-requisites to cope up with crises.

Being a visionary leader, Bangabandhu sacrificed his entire life for the economic emancipation of the marginalized, deprived, and oppressed people of this country. He fought to establish economic rights for them as he had been a lifelong believer in justice and freedom from exploitation, and oppression. From his writings, one comes to know that Bangabandhu was not communist, but he strongly believed in socialism and not in capitalism. He believed that capitalism is a tool of the oppressor while socialism is a way to free people from exploitation, and oppression and to remove inequality from society. Therefore, he emphasized on the role of the government as an imperative to uproot exploitation and inequality and establish a just society.
Post-War Reconstruction: The Case of Bangladesh

Gobinda Chakraborty

1. Introduction

Bangladesh made its presence in international political landscape through a successful national Liberation War waged against the internal colonial rule of Pakistan in 1971. Any armed warfare basically aims to destroy all aspects of social, political, economic, and cultural fabric. In fact, since the aim of warfare is to destroy civilian worlds, post-war praxis and projects have become an attempt to efface the effects of war and to reclaim a pre-war status-quo. The post-1971 War of Liberation was exception because Bangladesh was not looking for reclaiming status-quo, rather was eager to form an independent sovereign entity through post-war reconstruction and state building.

Post-war reconstruction in any political territory is unquestionably a critical job to carry on and its complete accomplishment is indeed impossible. Any sort of conflict, be it conventional small- or large-scale war or civil war, usually leaves a huge ravage in humane, economic, political, social, ethno-cultural and environmental terms. Demolition of infrastructures, such as roads, bridges, culverts, and homestead is a common phenomenon of any conflict/war; massive displacement of
people occurs, sometimes even people's unwilling refuge in either
neighbouring state; and loss of economy.

The founding stone of today's Bangladesh was deeply laid in
Bangabandhu's tireless pursuits of constructing Bangladesh through the
lens of nationalistic myth Sonar Bangla that he imagined for this Bengal
delta. This paper mainly deals with the post-war reconstruction project
under the visionary leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.
The second section of this paper defines what post-war reconstruction is.
The third section delves deep into the immediate sequential initiatives of
reconstruction in war-ravaged Bangladesh. The fourth section figures out
why Bangabandhu had to introduce Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami
League (BaKSAL) as his Second Revolution as a comprehensive post-
war reconstruction project. The fifth section concludes the paper.

2. Post-war Reconstruction: A Theoretical Framework

Reconstruction is possibly itself a loaded term with a wide range of veiled
assumptions. Some treat reconstruction as rebuilding of the status quo
ante, something which might be neither normatively desirable nor
politically possible while some consider reconstruction a political drive
of (re)building of national and state. Still, some scholars see reconstruction
as a project of hegemony and domination while others deem it as a "profit-
driven activity". ²

Post-war reconstruction has different meaning and includes a broad
array of immediate initiatives, such as reconnecting interrupted water
supplies, rebuilding rail and road networks, reorganizing societies,
rebuilding cultural heritage and repairing individual shattered lives. For
instance, in context of Great Britain Finer prioritized post-war
reconstruction initiatives in five important segments: physical
reconstruction, development of social services, education, machinery of
government and economic control of the state over industry and
commerce.³

In Bangladesh case, Rounaq Jahan made an early assessment of nation
building of Bangladesh in post-war reconstruction phase. She uttered,

"Like many other new states Bangladesh at its birth faced the formidable
problem of simultaneously building an input and an output sector—both a
state apparatus and a political community. The two major instruments of a state apparatus that is the civil bureaucracy and military were in disarray at the time of the new state's birth. In the post liberation period, not only did Bangladesh find itself deprived of the services of its experienced civil and military bureaucracy, but also schism and factionalism affected the morale and discipline of the civil service and the military left in Bangladesh...."^4

Reconstruction is the term that usually applied to the recovery or construction of social, economic, cultural, political, and judicial systems completed at the policy level, as well as at the grassroots level. But still there is much theoretical and practical confusion concerning the complexities of the term "reconstruction," whose discourses compete for dominance within international community organizations. The dominant discourse of reconstruction has been humanitarian assistance that promotes post-war social and economic transformations for civilian populations.

Post-war reconstruction has many different meanings. It includes an entire range of tasks from repairing individuals shattered in war to reorganizing societies and rebuilding cultural heritage. It involves a proactive programme of physical and social rebuilding in an attempt to address and rectify underlying causes of conflict and create the foundations for sustainable development. Post-war reconstruction is thus a search for inner peace, understanding of the reasons of the war, as well as the physical reconstruction of infrastructure. Traditionally the area of post-war reconstruction includes the four "R"s—repatriation, resettlement, reconciliation, and reintegration.

Recently scholars like Samuel P. Huntington, Fareed Zakaria, Francis Fukuyama agree that post-war reconstruction or state building needs a specific sequencing. Usually in sequencing, sent and only then democracy. There also seems to be consensus that reconstruction with the wrong sequencing is risky. The state-building process must start with the creation of a coherent nation. Something that usually requires changing borders or moving populations and has seldom in human history been accomplished without violence. State-building implies creating the Weberian monopoly of legitimate violence over a defined territory in a strict sense. Therefore, it has at its core the concentration of the means of coercion under the control of a central political authority.^5
In all cases of post-war reconstruction, it is indeed clear that while macroeconomic stability is important in post-war settings, political stability may depend upon the successful mobilization of the resources required meeting more immediate needs, such as the social reintegration of ex-combatants and the strengthening of democratic institutions.

3. Post-War Reconstruction Initiatives Returning of Refugees

The first and foremost measure of post-war reconstruction is to make sure that population who took refuge in other countries during war or conflict are coming back in their own land and resettle. Nearly ten million refugees sought shelter in the neighbouring Indian States, such as West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya, Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.6 Bangabandhu took immediate initiative to get them back and resettled in independent Bangladesh provided with instant ration and basic transportation to return to their respective homes. Besides, thousands of stranded Bangladeshis returned from Pakistan.

Surrendering Arms

Post-war phase of any newly independent state demands a priority task in the arena of defending territorial sovereignty and integrity from external threats as well as ensuring law and order situation for internal tranquility. It usually entails two important tasks: recollection of arms and ammunitions that were used during the warfare and reorganization of forces associated with defence services, law and order maintenance and border management. Bangabandhu returned to independent Bangladesh on 10 January 1972 and took immediate steps accordingly. On 17 January 1972 he made an appeal to freedom fighters to surrender their arms. Freedom fighters responded to his appeal and as a demonstration of support for Bangabandhu’s leadership they surrendered some 50,000 arms by 30 January 1972.7 However, a section of freedom fighters did not respond to Bangabandhu’s appeal which "reflected the seeds of factional competition for predominance in the power structure in post-liberation Bangladesh".8

On question of reorganizing forces Bangabandhu made parallel initiatives to strengthen defence forces. In post-independence Bangladesh the regular strength of defence services was much smaller than that of the
Mukti Bahini which was a combination of diverse armed groups that had fought during the War of Liberation. Besides, the police force was really small and was assisted by the para-military force, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR). He thus was initially planning to absorb several thousand freedom fighters in to, but it was not materialized due to firm refusal from the force on the ground. Bangabandhu then formed a separate force, the Rakkhi Bahini in order to assist the police force for effective enforcement of law and order. Hossain assumed: “The Rakhhi Bahini provoked resentment among the regular armed forces, who felt that their role would be diminished by the administration, which would favour the new force.”

**Return of Indian Troop**

Ensuring both internal and external security is the second important measure of post-war reconstruction. Bangabandhu’s personal interceding with the then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, India withdrew its troops within three months from Bangladesh. This is indeed an unprecedented event in contemporary history that gave a huge boost up in professionalizing army. Bangabandhu initiated the return of 1,50,000 Indian troops who did fight with the Mukti Bahini in the Liberation War of Bangladesh. His farsighted leadership made it possible and by 25 March 1972, the last contingent of the Indian Army returned to India. However, the Indian Army took away huge number of arms and ammunition left by the surrendering Pakistani Army which made the nascent Bangladesh army virtually disarmed.

**Diplomacy for Recognition**

Recognition as an independent state entity in global political landscape is perhaps the most important task for any state in its post-war phase. Bangabandhu was much eager for recognition of Bangladesh from the international community. In fact, only India and Bhutan recognized Bangladesh before 11 January 1972. Thirty-six states including the UK recognized Bangladesh between 11 January to 14 February 1972. At the international level, it is largely due to Bangabandhu’s personal appeal that nearly a hundred countries, including most of the major powers, recognized Bangladesh within a few months. The UN, even before
Bangladesh was admitted as a member, set up the United Nations Relief Operations in Dhaka (UNROD). It was later renamed as UNROB, after Bangladesh joined the UN. That has thus far been the largest international relief and reconstruction effort by the UN.

Making of Constitution

Constitution is always treated as a legal, political and social document of any state as it identifies supreme power, "marries power with justice", "provides a framework for continuing political struggle", and shapes society with common aspirations. It states basic principles of the foundation of a political community; defines its boundary, nature and authority; expresses its identity and values; declares the rights and duties of citizens; regulates political institutions; shares power between layers of wording between sacred and secular authorities. Bangabandhu took prompt initiative to frame a constitution for independent Bangladesh.

On political governance and reconstruction Bangabandhu gave us a full-fledged constitution on 4 November 1972, only 325 days after Bangladesh’s liberation. A general consensus was there on the four basic principles of state policy (democracy, socialism, secularism and nationalism). The most important feature of the Constitution is its attempt at a synthesis between democracy and socialism (popularly known as "Mujibism" in Bangladesh). It provides for the usual democratic rights of the citizens in Part III (Art. 26-47). Right to equality before the law; protection from arbitrary arrest; freedom of movement, freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, press, association and assembly are also guaranteed. But the exercise of most of the rights is subject to "reasonable restrictions" imposed by law in the interest of the "security of the state" or "public order" or "public health" or "morality" or "decency." "No person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty save in accordance with law" (Art. 32). All laws inconsistent with the fundamental rights shall be void to the extent of inconsistency (Art. 26). Thus, the constitution protects citizens against arbitrary and unjust actions of the executive and administrative branches, and also envisages a judiciary with the power of determining whether the laws of parliament imposing restrictions on the rights are "reasonable."
Setting Foreign Policy Principles

On the basis of Bangabandhu’s forward-looking foreign policy, based on peaceful coexistence Bangladesh was able to establish close and cooperative ties with all the countries of the world within a short time. Bangladesh joined the Non-Aligned Movement, the Commonwealth, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and finally the UN between 1972 and 1974. Earlier, Bangladesh joined World Bank, IMF, ADB and other financial institutions. Bangabandhu, in his speech at the UN General Assembly in 1974, announced that “peace is an imperative for the survival of mankind. It represents the deepest aspirations of men and women throughout the world. Peace to endure, however, must be based on justice.”

Bangabandhu tried to pursue a more balanced foreign policy and to forge closer ties with other powers in such a manner that it would not become excessively depended on both India and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in a patron-client pattern of relationship. Moreover, it was soon realized that a small and weak country like Bangladesh can hardly afford to antagonize a superpower like the United States of America (USA).

Macroeconomic Recovery

Macroeconomic recovery is a must job in post-war reconstruction. In macroeconomic front Bangabandhu gave top priority on reconstruction and rehabilitation. He set a recovery programme with immediate effect while there was no significant foreign exchange reserve. Priority areas were “(a) making adequate provisions for economic rehabilitation of all the cultivators, weavers, fishermen, artisans and craftsmen who had lost their tools and implements, thereby giving priority to the vast majority of the population who lived in the rural areas; (b) providing financial assistance to those students and teachers who were facing difficulty in resuming their respective academic responsibilities; (c) setting up homes for orphans and distressed women in the sub-divisional headquarters of the country; (d) ensuring distribution of electricity and bringing it up to about 60 per cent of the monthly average of 1969-70; (e) rehabilitating the dislocated transport and communication system of the country to ensure necessary
movement of goods; and (f) ensuring the providing of safe drinking water in the rural areas to prevent the outbreak of epidemics.

**Securing Food**

Disruption of food grain production due to natural calamities, such as floods and droughts was a crucial issue for independent Bangladesh under the leadership of Bangabandhu. In fact, the nine-month bloody war of liberation not only took human toll but also destroyed huge agricultural implements which put Bangladesh in serious apprehension of feeding its population with the available food stocks at hand. There was the possibility of widespread starvation. Food security situation even worsened with the return of the millions of Bengali refugees from India who fled there after the sudden attack of the Pakistani Army and its collaborators in post-25 March 1971 period.

Bangabandhu was much cautious about feeding his people and urged the international community for quick food aids along with imports. The UN Secretary General launched an appeal for food donations in early 1972. The UN conducted the largest relief operation in Bangladesh. More than US$100 million US food aid was channeled through United Nations Relief Operations in Dhaka (UNROD). The US humanitarian aid prior to the formal recognition of Bangladesh was second totaling US$119 million to India’s contribution which was US$142 million while former USSR’s food assistance stood at only US$6 million.

**Making of Planning Commission**

Planning is always crucial as by nature it holistically sets goals for building any newly independent state in its post-war reconstruction phase. It generally involves rigorous public policy making and identifies means to achieve policy goals within a stipulated time. Bangabandhu believed that economists would deliver better services for the nation with sectoral planning. He, thereby, composed the Planning Commission in line with the ideals of struggle for freedom and appointed renowned economist Professor Nurul Islam as its first Deputy Chairman in January 1972. Under Bangabandhu's direction it became “a fairly large-size and active department” with more than fifty economists and statisticians by June 1972 and successfully launched the First Five-Year Plan (1973-78) in
November 1973. Professor Islam aptly uttered the main goal of the First Five Year Plan:

"Bangladesh was one of the poorest counties of the world even before liberation. Superimposed upon this low level of income has been the effects of war and its aftermath. The level of output in 1972-73 was about 20 per cent below that of the last normal year, i.e., 1969-70. Population in the meanwhile has been growing at about 3 per cent per annum and will continue to grow at about this rate during the seventies. At a minimum, therefore, the Plan postulates recovery of the economy to the level of 1969-70 and a growth rate thereafter higher than the growth rate of population." 

Besides, the First Five Year Plan aimed to absorb surplus labour force available during the Plan period; targeted to increase domestic savings from three sectors: agriculture under private ownership, profits from nationalized industries and profits originating from distributive trades; and set to create 5.4 million man-years of new employment.

**Recovering Agriculture and Industry**

In agriculture sector, Bangabandhu agreed with the advice of international agencies and decided to take steps to improve the desperate situation by introducing greater units of fertilizers (increase the use of Urea, TSP and Potash), better quality seeds and pesticides. Nearly 24 thousand tons of IRRI-20 seeds and 800 tons of IRRI-8 seeds were distributed within this emergency programme. This helped to avert serious food scarcity in 1972.

Within the industrial sector, Bangabandhu took initiatives to create greater inter-active coordination and engagement between the Bangladesh Industrial Development Corporation, Power Industries Development Corporation, Bangladesh Industrial Technical Assistance Center and the Bangladesh Small Industries Corporation. Particular emphasis was given on the access to scarce working capital and supply of imported and local raw materials which resulted in substantial movement forward in terms of meeting operational costs and achieving minimum targets.

**Rebuilding of Communication and Infrastructure**

During the post-war reconstruction phase India played a very pivotal role in economic rebuilding of Bangladesh. In the economic field India
emerged as the paramount aid donor of Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{22} In the first six months of the post-independence period 36 per cent of all aid committed and 67 per cent of aid disbursed came from India.\textsuperscript{23} Another form of Indian aid to Bangladesh in the post-liberation period was its technical assistance. It played a crucial role in the rehabilitation of the war-ravaged communication network, especially in restoring railway lines. Indian technicians temporarily repaired damaged railway lines, bridges, culverts, airfields; and cleared mines and unexploded bombs.

Infrastructure rebuilding is another task of post-war reconstruction. Bangabandhu brought back transport and power sectors back on track. Economists pointed out that the transport sector (roads, railways, civil aviation and internal shipping including ports) in particular had suffered huge losses and required immediate attention. Bangabandhu did what needed. He took urgent steps for rebuilding the damaged transmission and distribution lines in the power sector.

**Making Public Policies**

Post-war reconstruction always needs financial and budgetary discipline by formalizing policies of public finance. Under the leadership of Bangabandhu Bangladesh launched its first National Budget for the financial year 1972-1973 fixing priorities on agriculture, education and social welfare, including construction of houses for freedom fighters who lost everything during the Liberation War. In line with the national budget, Bangabandhu took special initiative to launch Bangladesh’s First Five Year Plan 1973-1978 targeting poverty reduction and ensuring education to include health, food and housing for all. Bangabandhu put genuine emphasis on agriculture, small and medium enterprises and cottage industries for employment generation and reducing income inequality.

**Housing and Resettlement**

Under the leadership of Bangabandhu the housing and settlement sector was divided into ten different sectors: the Building Directorate, the Khulna Development Authority, the Dhaka Improvement Trust, the Chattogram Development Authority, the Public Works Department, the Directorate of Fire Services, the Police Directorate, the Parjatan Sangstha, the Bangladesh
Rifles and the Office of the Surveyor General. Bangabandhu took personal interest in the coordinated engagement of these different stakeholders and allocated an amount geared to meet the immediate basic needs.

The degree of success in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of war-devastated Bangladesh was noted with appreciation in domestic and international media outlets and published reports of international organizations. For instance, UNROD in its report, “Bangladesh: A Survey of Damages and Repairs” noted that coordinated efforts of Bangladesh and the international community had led this country to “settling down as an organized community with a government working steadily through and towards democratic procedures.”


BaKSAL was basically a comprehensive post-war reconstruction project initiated after three years of independence. Bangabandhu called it “the Second Revolution” or “System Change”.

It included total reconstruction of society, state, politics and economy. He especially put more stress on five areas: curbing of corruption, increasing food production, population control, restructuring administration and national unity. Even though some political quarters termed BaKSAL as “one-party system” and relentlessly argued that Bangabandhu did want to establish one-party rule but if one judiciously examines the project will genuinely find out that BaKSAL was genuinely a comprehensive post-war reconstruction project which, if properly implemented, could have taken Bangladesh in a new height both in terms of its nation-building and state-building. However, reasons behind this comprehensive reconstruction project were manifold.

Firstly, in post-1971 phase Bangabandhu asked all the freedom fighters to surrender their arms used in the War of Liberation but a section of them did not do so. Later, arms that were held out were used in armed robbery, bank looting, ransom collection, mugging and extortions which created trouble in public life and worsened the law and order situation.

Secondly, even though Bangabandhu was dreaming a healthy and vibrant politics to build Bangladesh, some leaders especially younger ones
that freedom fighters, instead of disbanded, should form the nucleus of “the party of the revolution” and then this party could lead a class struggle within the framework of a one-party system and take society forward towards the goals of social revolution. Variants of this concept were adopted by a section of the students, which led to the emergence of a new political party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) in contrast to the politics which had succeeded in developing a broad platform of unity prior to independence, based on the shared experience of disparity and discrimination. Some argue that the emergence of JSD filled in the political vacuum of opposition politics while others argue that JSD did jeopardize the post-war reconstruction and political order of Bangladesh.

Thirdly, natural calamities, such as flood, draught put Bangladesh in pressure to address food scarcity on the one hand and international politics over the jute export from Bangladesh to Cuba paused the disbursement of food aid under PL-480 from the USA on the other hand. An unexpected famine occurred in 1974 that took away 27,500 people for good.

Fourthly, domestic economy was in recession because of the oil shock of 1973 which skyrocketed commodity price; increased corruption, nepotism and the use of speed money; and institutionalized black marketing and syndication of both luxury and inferior goods.

Fifthly, the Bangladesh military in the early years following independence was a highly politicized and factionalized force. This condition was a consequence of the 1971 Liberation War. The military was factionalized on different lines. There were “freedom fighters” (those who fought in the war of liberation) and “repatriates” (those who were in West Pakistan during the period of Liberation War and returned to Bangladesh in 1973-1974). Also, there were forces who wanted a “productive army” (like Mao Zedong’s Red Army) and those who wanted a strictly professional army (like in Western countries). Many army officers were not happy with the Mujib government’s neglect of the armed forces. Allegedly, he was reluctant to build a strong army and paid no heed to rebuild the cantonments and military institutes that were destroyed during the Liberation War. During his tenure, Bangabandhu progressively reduced the budget of the armed forces. It is alleged that Bangabandhu viewed a big army as nothing more than an extravagance.
5. Conclusion

Bangabandhu’s vision continues to be relevant in today’s uncertain and challenging times. His tireless activism, vision and transformational leadership epitomized the principles of advancing social inclusion, empowerment and justice for all, while putting strong emphasis on strengthening international cooperation by fostering foreign policy principle: friendship to all and malice towards none. Bangabandhu was a true nationalist; a leader of courage; a man of conviction; a sage of peace; a champion of justice and equality; and a man void of vanity. His transformational leadership gave us a distinct identity on the global political landscape. He will always be in our hearts not only as the “poet of politics” but also as the “Darling of Bengal Delta”.

Notes


According to UNHCR estimates available on 01 December 1971 there were about 6.79 million refugees in different camps. In addition, there were about 3.13 million refugees who took shelter with friends or relatives.

Arms surrender officially started in Tangail on January 24, 1972 in presence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Kaderia Bahini (one of the largest and most effective groups of Mukti Bahini) under the leadership of veteran freedom fighter Bangabir Kader Siddiqui and his troops surrendered their arms to Bangabandhu. Other groups of Maukti Bahini also surrendered their arms in the next few days.

Kamal Hossain, op. cit., p.127.

Ibid.


IDEA, op. cit., pp. 2-3.


Ibid., p. 141.

Harun-or-Rashid, *Bangabandhu’s Deleo Biplob (Second Revolution of Bangabandhu)*, Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2020, p. 35.

For details on factionalism within the Bangladesh army in the first decade of the country’s independence, see Marcus F. Franda, *Bangladesh: The First Decade*, New Delhi: South Asia Publishers, 1982.

On this point, see Lawrence Ziring, *Bangladesh: From Mujib to Ershad: An Interpretive Study*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 97. In addition, the Mujib government created the Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini (National Defence Force, or JRB), a paramilitary force trained by Indian assistance with legal powers and protection, which was conceived by the military as a threat to its corporate interests. See Mohammad Ibrahim, *Sena Bahnir Abhhontore Atash Bachor [Twenty-eight Years within the Military]*, Dhaka: Mowla Brothers, 1999, p. 29.
Bangabandhu’s overall economic, social and political vision can be considered to be encapsulated in what he called Sonar Bangla. In his political, social, and economic pursuits, Bangabandhu was guided by human-centricity. Bangabandhu focussed on human beings’ needs and aspirations. As soon as one focusses on human being, the multiplicity of needs of the people comes up. On the contrary, the segmental approach is followed when one talks about a project on education or health or any other sector. However, if one starts with the human being, all aspects of human life and living appear before him. For a decent life, human beings need not only food but also education, health services, water, electricity, and all the other things. It is recognized in the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh.\(^1\) Besides, it is also stated that there will be no inequality in the country, everybody will enjoy human rights and everybody will live a humanly dignified life.\(^2\) These three tenets were mentioned very clearly in the Declaration of Independence and later elaborated in the Constitution. Moreover, four pillars, e.g., Bangali nationalism, secularism, democracy and socialism, become the fundamental state policies of Bangladesh.
Against this backdrop, to realize the vision of Bangabandhu’s vision development process has to be inclusive—everybody has to be legitimately and effectively incorporated in it. In the United Nations (UN) launched “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, nobody to be excluded is a basic tenet. “Inclusion of everybody” was also the ideals of the Liberation War of Bangladesh. It was also in the vision of Bangabandhu. He always visualized one society in Bangladesh not many based on wealth and power distribution. However, it is not possible to ensure equality in the society in terms of income, education, leadership position, political power, etc. that has not happened in the world any time in the past and will never happen. However, it is important to ensure equity in this society. Following the ideals of the Liberation War reflecting in Bangabandhu’s vision, there is a need to establish a society in this country where all enjoy dignity as well as human and social rights. Besides, everybody will perform their responsibilities, but nobody will lord it over others. This needs to be ensured by establishing equality of everybody before the law and a people-centric approach to administration and provision of services. To realize the vision of Bangabandhu, the country must focus on ensuring human dignity and all human rights of all citizens of the country, who are constitutionally equal owners of this country.

Bangabandhu tried to promote his ideas through various actions during his tenure. After the independence of Bangladesh, first of all, Bangabandhu focussed on relief and rehabilitation for the returnees (about 10 million) from India and destroyed household economies during the War of Liberation. Regarding the reconstruction of the economy, Bangabandhu gave special attention to agriculture, farmers, and farmworkers. He extended various kinds of assistance and stimulus to restart and rejuvenate agriculture including the withdrawal of 10 lakh certificate cases, test relief (taka 16 crore), loan (taka 10 crore) and cooperative loans (taka 5 crore), and initiatives to provide seeds and agricultural tools and machinery. As per the promises made in the 1970 Election Manifesto, he also gave attention to industry and business. In this regard, he nationalized large industries and businesses, banks, and insurance companies. Also, a land ownership ceiling was fixed at 100 bighas per family.

All the initiatives undertaken during his tenure were in consonance with his vision of socialism, implying social justice and removing sources
of exploitation of the poor by the capitalists. Bangabandhu did not undermine people's right to property up to a certain level. Therefore, he promoted small and cottage industries and businesses. Likewise, he recognized that the war-devastated transport system needed to be restored, otherwise the movement of people, and goods and services would not be possible that would hinder socio-economic progress. Therefore, he gave high priority to reconstructing infrastructure, particularly roads, bridges, and culverts across the country, and succeeded in reasonably improving the transport networks. Eventually, in 1975, he decided to pursue inclusive development through a comprehensive cooperative movement. That was a revolutionary decision. According to the movement, nobody's land and property would be taken away and all will work together for the benefit of all and the nation. The property owners, landowners, workers, cooperatives, and the government would get their respective shares. Now a major concern in Bangladesh is the tax-to-Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio that is one of the lowest in the world. It is nearly nine per cent only, while in Nepal, it is 17 per cent. In contrast, the rate of becoming rich is the highest in the world. In this respect, the paper argues that if Bangabandhu had lived on and his cooperative movement was successful, this problem would not be there as the government would automatically receive adequate revenues to run the government and provide necessary services to the people.

The first policy transformation came after 1975, following the brutal killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The country shifted its focus from human to capital and market-based system. That transformation progressed over the years. However, economic growth remained persistently low until 2010. The decade of the 1980s has been termed by many as a lost decade. During that time, the average annual GDP growth rate was around 3.4 per cent. The nationalized industries were being de-nationalized, and private sector industries and businesses were supported by the government financial assistance like the Pakistan period. Despite assisting, the GDP growth rate did not accelerate, poverty did not go down fast enough and foreign aid dependence sharply increased. During the 1980s, the total development budget was depended on foreign aid. In certain years, part of the revenue budget was financed out of funds generated from PL480 food assistance.
The same free-market policy orientation and transformation process continued into the 1990s and afterward. However, in the second half of the 1990s, a major policy intervention was introduced by the Awami League government in the agricultural sector. Agriculture was neglected in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. Bangladesh was advised by development partners not to give much importance to agriculture as rice and other agricultural commodities could be bought from international markets. Rather, emphasis should be given to industrialization to accelerate economic growth. That advice was followed by the then government during the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. In the second half of the 1990s, the first Sheikh Hasina government decided to promote agriculture by providing substantial agricultural subsidies despite the opposition of the international agencies, e.g., the World Bank and bilateral aid providers. As a result, agricultural production in the country had increased, leading to self-sufficiency by the late 1990s. That was a major achievement. In 2001, there was again a political change, and agriculture suffered setbacks due to lukewarm support. Towards the end of that decade, there was a military-supported caretaker government for two years (2007-08). During that period overall economic policy thrust remained on unfettered free market dynamics and it is continuing till now. However, when unfettered, the market becomes tyrannical. Indeed, Bangabandhu’s viewed capitalism as exploitative, causing increasing disparity and suffering to ordinary people. For this reason, he did not support capitalism and believed in socialism.

It is now well known that the unfettered free-market paradigm or neoliberalism has caused glaring and increasing disparity worldwide. Globally, the top one per cent people own more than half of the world’s wealth and the other 99 per cent has the rest. The 99 per cent is also divided into many classes—from various levels of rich to non-poor, poor, extreme poor, and the destitute. In the United States of America (USA), one per cent people own close to 40 per cent of the country’s wealth. In Bangladesh disparity is also high and increasing. The income GINI increased from 0.45 in 2010 to 0.48 in 2017. In terms of the Gross National Income (GNI), the share of the bottom five per cent declined from 0.78 per cent to 0.23 per cent from 2010 to 2017, while the top five per cent increased from 23.61 per cent to 27.89 per cent.
In Bangladesh disparity has increased steeply during the decade of 2010s like the earlier periods. It could not increase as predicted because of the high rates of GDP growth and certain policies of the government, starting from 2009. For instance, the large and expanding safety-net programmes have helped reduce poverty. Other major anti-poverty, anti-disparity policies and actions include agricultural subsidies, credit, development activities (new varieties of rice and other crops and increased support to livestock, poultry, and fishery), and regular allowances to different disadvantaged groups. Poverty kept declining and the poverty ratio was 20.5 per cent and the extreme poverty rate was about 11 per cent before the outbreak of the corona pandemic. However, the rates of decline in the poverty ratios have slowed down in recent years. The plausible explanation for that is less entrenched poverty is easier to eradicate, but hardcore poverty is difficult to address. From the personal experience of the author, it is seen that very difficult circumstances are faced by various hardcore poor groups. Hence, it is often hard to remove the poverty of these groups. Moreover, different groups of hardcore people, e.g., people with disabilities, tea garden workers, poor hill people, coastal poor, the poor living in haor areas have specific problems. Thus, one specific approach is not effective for all. Differentiated policies and programmes have to be designed and implemented to solve these specific problems faced by different groups. This approach takes time to translate into action. Importantly, urgent attention needs to be given to resolving the specific problems faced by different extreme poor groups to accelerate poverty reduction.

Overall, in terms of economic growth and progress in key social indicators, Bangladesh has done very well in the decade of 2010s. This, indeed, is well recognized internationally. Government has undertaken different policies from 2009. However, the market economy perspectives dampened some of the social perspectives. As a result, socio-economic disparity has increased. This was recognized to be a major problem. The country has done very well until the corona pandemic began.

The goal of the country is to become an upper-middle-income country by 2031. Despite the progress, Bangladesh is still a Least Developed Country (LDC). After fulfilling the three criteria, e.g., per capita income, economic vulnerability index, and human asset index twice in 2018 and
2021 and some procedural requirements, Bangladesh will graduate from the LDC status in 2026. It is estimated that the country may lose about US$ 2.7 billion a year due to loss of trade facilities. Considering the persistent high economic growth it is not significant. Despite other disadvantages, it will enhance the dignity as well as open ample economic opportunities for the country to sign bilateral and multilateral trade agreements. The paper also argues that despite removing the multifiber quota system Bangladesh’s exports have not collapsed. Rather, it has increased as well as textiles and jute goods exports flourished. Therefore, for LDC graduation, Bangladesh should not wait for long and should shake off this LDC tag in the Mujib year. However, the corona pandemic is a major setback. The paper emphasizes that Bangladesh should be out of this categorization before Sheikh Hasina’s present term of office as Prime Minister expires towards the end of 2023. Nevertheless, it depends on how long the pandemic lasts and how fast and how well the country can build back.

The categorization of least developed, developing, and developed is not very effective. The categorization based on income—low-income, middle income, high-income—is straightforward. Bangabandhu was agreed to categorize Bangladesh as an LDC in 1975 due to the repeated floods in 1974, economic problems, and pressure by certain quarters at home and abroad. If he had lived longer, he would have taken Bangladesh out of this category at the first available opportunity. Three countries did not agree to be in the LDCs group, e.g., Papua New Guinea, Ghana, and Zimbabwe. They are now doing fairly well. In 2019 per capita income was US$2,750 in Papua New Guinea, US$2,220 in Ghana, and about US$1,400 in Zimbabwe despite political upheavals over the years in these countries.¹

In the rural areas of Bangladesh, people are moving ahead. They are often guided by ambitious aspirations and work hard. The present government has also created a policy framework to facilitate rural development. Consequently, both agriculture and non-agricultural activities have flourished in rural areas. The foundation of the national economy was getting stronger before the pandemic. Exports, inward remittances, digitization process, and other sectors have contributed to the economic growth of the country. Rural economy (agriculture and non-agriculture) is the foundation of this growth. However, there was little recognition of the
seminal contribution of the rural economy to the country’s robust economic surge until the outbreak of the corona pandemic. Now, it is widely due to the contribution of agriculture ensuring food security in the country during the pandemic. Following the vision of Bangabandhu, the present government has also prioritized agriculture and rural enterprise.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the country has emerged as one of the world’s fastest-growing economies. In the election manifesto of 2018, Bangladesh Awami League has recognized most of the major problems. Hence, these problems are neither new nor un-recognized. One of the problems is the skills gap. It was also mentioned in the manifesto. Skilled manpower is crucial to take forward the economy and society. They are also important to explore the opportunities of overseas employment and secure more remittances. A skill development policy was adopted in 2011 that needs to be implemented properly. Required types and levels of skills need to be produced in adequate numbers. In this regard, it is necessary to survey to find out which sector needs what kinds of skills and of what levels. This survey also needs to update periodically. Then the education system should be geared to that end. Though lack of skilled manpower is well recognized, adequate initiatives have not been undertaken so far. Hence, urgent attention is needed to pursue sustainable development (socially acceptable and environmentally sound economic growth).

Corruption has been recognized as a debilitating issue and a zero-tolerance policy has been declared in this regard. Actions were initiated to curb corruption. However, due to the corona pandemic, this campaign lost its momentum as government attention has shifted to the management of the pandemic. It can be expected that efforts will be devoted soon towards uprooting corruption as indicated in the election manifesto.

Besides, there are deficits in governance that should be removed. Another problem is the persisting centralized policymaking and implementation system. In this regard, political and administrative decentralization is essential for more effective administration and pursuit of people-centred development. The relative backwardness of the rural areas also creates obstacles. Hence, like urban areas, necessary facilities and services should be ensured. Besides, training and engaging the youth in appropriate activities are necessary for national development and banking sector and share market conundrum. The government has
recognized and promised to address these problems properly and effectively. However, the pertinent question is how to overcome them. Some of the issues such as corruption need to be addressed in various sectors and at various levels of society and economy. Because some are related to geographical areas such as rural development whereas other are, such as youth in development, related to specific groups of people. In all cases, besides government action, other relevant actors need to be mobilized to purposefully address the problems.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has done well than other countries around the world in managing the corona pandemic. It has succeeded in terms of containing its spread and treating the affected as well as ensuring livelihoods of the millions of economically devastated people and keeping the economic activities ongoing at a reasonable level. Bangladesh’s GDP growth rate was 4.5 per cent in 2020 and it is predicted to be better this year. Not many countries have achieved similar GDP growth rates. Indeed, the economy is starting to recover that needs to be rejuvenated. As early as 13 April 2020, just about one month after the outbreak of the pandemic, the Prime Minister issued a stimulus package, amounting to 3.7 per cent of the GDP. Later, it was raised to 4.3 per cent.

Now the question is are the policies and programmes adopted being implemented properly and timely? This is crucial if the projected results are to be achieved. If the implementation has been as good as planning and programming, results would have been much better. Despite discussing and recognizing implementation deficits as a major challenge, it remains unaddressed or poorly addressed. Efforts of the government and all other actors must be geared towards getting back as soon as possible to the trajectory the country was on in 2019 so that it can move forward towards successfully implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG Agenda) and becoming an inclusive higher middle-income country by 2031.

The SDG Agenda was adopted by the UN on 25 September 2015. After four weeks Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina appointed a committee in her office to plan how to implement this programme effectively. The committee has been doing well. It has prioritized the targets under the 17 goals, and selected 39 of them as the topmost priority for Bangladesh, and
added inclusion of everybody as the crucial cross-cutting theme. Hence, the priority for Bangladesh is 39+1. That is, everybody has to be included in all activities. The ministries/agencies as leading and supporting for the implementation of these targets have also been identified and intimated accordingly. Unfortunately, implementation did not get momentum before the outbreak of the corona pandemic. The implementing authorities could not be geared in terms of orientation and capacity. A lot of attention needs to be given to these issues. Otherwise, there will be large deficit in the implementation.

The vision of Bangabandhu includes the tenet of inclusion of everybody that is also a requirement under the ideals of the Liberation War. SDG Agenda incorporates Bangabandhu’s vision. Hence, it is important for Bangladesh to purposefully and effectively implement this agenda. Much more emphasis needs to be given on implementation—allocation of resources, improving skills and capacity, coordination, supervision, timely actions—for the best possible results by minimizing the challenges faced and maximizing the opportunities available.

This year, “the Mujib Year and also the Golden Jubilee Year of Independence and Victory”, offers opportunities for doing the best from the country’s vantage points to promote Bangabandhu’s vision of people-centered development. In this regard, the government’s role is pre-eminent. The SDG agenda that is to be implemented by 2030 provides a framework to implement and realize Bangabandhu’s vision to make Bangladesh an inclusive upper-middle-income country by 2031, not leaving anybody behind. In the business-as-usual trajectory, Bangladesh, or any country can become an upper-middle-income country, even a developed country by leaving a lot of people behind. That’s something Bangabandhu would not want to do. Therefore, everybody must be equitably included in the process of moving forward. It needs to be ensured that all the citizens, the owners of this Republic, move forward towards improving their living and socio-political conditions and achieving national goals as equal human beings and as equal citizens of the country and not differentiated based on economic or social or any other ground. For that to happen, there must be an attitudinal change from the now overwhelming “I”-based to “We” together approach and politics, and administration must be informed and guided truly by the ideals of the War of Liberation.
Notes

1. Constitution of Bangladesh.
3. Constitution of Bangladesh.
Bangladesh, once dubbed as a basket case, has now become an international role model of development. The journey was perilous; however, with the strong leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh was able to set foot in the right direction to become one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. Bangabandhu laid the foundation of this success by reforming the agriculture sector. The increase in agricultural production and success in diversification are some of the areas where Bangladesh now takes great pride. The contribution of agriculture to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 13.60 per cent in 2019. Though the contribution of the agriculture sector is slowly going down, still 60 per cent of the population are in some way related to agriculture to maintain their livelihoods. According to the Labor Force Survey (LFS) 2016, 40.60 per cent of the total labour force are yet to be engaged in agriculture. During the last five years, agriculture has played a pivotal role in curbing down poverty by 10 basis points in 2018. Bangladesh secured the third position in the world in harvesting fishes from natural sources. Moreover, the country is placed third in vegetable production and fifth in goat meat production. It is noteworthy that crop
cultivation has shot up four times in the last five decades, despite the gradual reduction of agricultural land.

These successes can only be attributed to the visionary leadership of Bangabandhu, who came into politics after being moved away by the exploitation of the peasants and the moribund state of agriculture of British India. During 1943, around 50 million people lost their lives in the notorious “Bengal Famine”. This deprivation, along with the exploitation by the British rulers, had put the peasantry in total jeopardy. With an ardent determination to change the lives of the peasants, Bangabandhu was elected once as councillor of the Nikhil Bharat Muslim League. Bangabandhu deeply believed that this nation could not prosper without progressing in agriculture with an elevation in peasants’ lives. Keeping this in mind, Bangabandhu pioneered the formation of the United Front in 1953 with the participation from Awami Muslim League, Krishok-Shromik Party, Nizam-e-Islam, and Ganatantri Dal. Besides, many of the famous 21-Point Movement, the election manifesto of the 1954 general election, were related to agriculture and peasants.

From arranging agricultural land for the landless peasants to the commercialization and marketing of products, nationalization of jute business, the establishment of a cooperative agricultural system, canal excavation and irrigation to fight against flooding and famine; all these were inscribed in the 21-Points Movement. In a nutshell, the movement was the charter of freedom for the Bangladeshi peasants in the mid-fifties of the last century. The pain inflicted upon the Bangladeshi people reached a climax when the Pakistani Hanadar Bahini looted the reserved grains during the 1971 Liberation War. Moreover, food import was stopped, even normal production was not possible due to the prolonged war and devastation. These culminated in a total impasse in agriculture and other sectors. Upon returning after the Liberation War, Bangabandhu reiterated at the first official press conference in Dhaka that this freedom will become real freedom for him on the day when all the agonies of the peasants, workers and destitute people of Bangladesh will come to an end. He also said, “Farmers have to work relentlessly for the agricultural revolution of the country. Not even an inch of land in Bangladesh can be kept uncultivated. The united but selfless efforts of the people will ensure the rapid reconstruction of the shattered economy of the country”. After the
independence, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman immediately took massive steps in land reform, industrialization, incentives to small entrepreneurs, revocation of certificate cases against peasants, waiving of the agricultural loan with interest, integrated programme in agricultural modernization and establishment of cooperatives, etc. Speaking on radio and television on the occasion of the announcement of nationalization policy on 26 March 1972, Bangabandhu said that farmers are the most exploited and oppressed class in the society, and a significant part of the country's efforts must be devoted to improving their condition. Agriculture was the most prioritized sector of Bangabandhu's government. Bangabandhu had taken numerous initiatives to modernize and develop the agricultural sector.

In the making of new Bangladesh, Bangabandhu established the first Planning Commission of Bangladesh in 1972 with renowned economists and development specialists. This commission facilitated the preparation of the First Five Year Plan (FFYP) (1973-1978), which was in effect from 01 July 1973. The plan was for reconstruction and development of the economy, taking into account the inescapable political, social and economic realities of Bangladesh. It stressed the importance of the capacity building of the agricultural institutions for its modernization and enhancing the management capacity of the related institutions. Out of the 500 crore taka development budget, Bangabandhu allocated 100 crore taka (20 per cent) in agriculture sector. He believed that improved agriculture was the precondition for building a self-reliant economy. There were in total 12 broad objectives of the first FYP. The second objective was to improve the productivity of different economic sectors, especially agriculture and industry. Notably, agriculture occupied the lion share of the GDP during that time. The fourth objective was to increase the production of consumer goods, mainly agricultural goods. In 1972-73, 56.1 per cent of GDP was contributed by the agricultural sector, particularly crop, livestock, forest and fisheries. The goal was to reduce the dependency on food imports by increased production. The plan set a target for increasing the agricultural value added. It was also spelt out in the plan that a sustainable and modern agricultural system would be followed in place of traditional and weather-dependent uncertain agricultural practices. There were two specific targets of the plan. One was to attain self-
sufficiency in food production and the other was to ensure earnings for the rural unemployed citizens to meet their minimum basic food requirements. Besides, other objectives include increasing agricultural earnings, providing productive employment for the rural labour force, reducing rural poverty through special arrangements for the small farmers and landless people, and eliminating income inequality.

Bangabandhu planned to increase the use of agricultural land for high-yielding food production from 15 lakh acres to 36 lakh acres during FY 1972-73. He also envisioned installing 4.25 lakh pumps, 2,400 deep tubewells, and 4,000 shallow tubewells during the boro production period for facilitating the production of grains. To ensure smooth production, Bangabandhu set chemical fertilizer price at 20 taka per maund. It was half of the price that the government paid to procure fertilizers. Bangabandhu’s initiatives towards agriculture were comprehensive and aimed for institutional development and facilitating rapid production. As a result, domestic production started to increase from 1973. Moreover, the production of sugar, salt, fabric, yarn, machinery, newsprint, electronic parts, diesel engines, looms, centrifugal pumps, etc., saw a remarkable increase. From April 1975, the situation started to improve rapidly. For example, the prices of rice came down to 5.5 taka/kg, the price of potato decreased to 1.5 taka/kg. The following table shows the production and import of foods from 1971-72 to 1975-76.

*Table 5(4).1 Production and Import of Food Items from 1971-72 to 1975-76*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production (Lakh Tons)</th>
<th>Import (Lakh Tons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971-72</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>28.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972-73</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>16.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973-74</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>24.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>14.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Major overhauls in the agricultural sector undertaken by Bangabandhu’s Government from the post-liberation period to February 1973 were:

- Distribution of Takavi loans of 10 crore taka among the peasants in 13 months.
- Distribution of cooperative loans of 5 crore taka.
- Procurement of 83,000 tons of fertilizer and distribution of 50,000 tons among peasants.
- Supply of 2125 maunds Boro rice seeds.
- Distribution of 3000 maunds wheat seed.
- Distribution of 1700 maunds potato seed.
- Setting up 94 deep tubewells for irrigation.
- Setting up 100 shallow tubewells.
- Supply of 20,000 power pumps.
- Ensure irrigation facility at 80 lakh acre land.
- Supply of 21 tractors to Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC).
- Supply of 1 lakh bulls at a reduced price.
- Supply of 50,000 cows at a subsidized price.
- Establishment of 53 rice and wheat mills and renovation of 291 mills. For this, employment for 9000 people was created.
- Construction and renovation of 10 lakh houses with the help of the United Nations (UN).
- Distribution of relief amounting to 30 crore taka.
- Reconstruction of 98 government silos and hospitals at the expense of 63 crore taka.

Because of these initiatives, high-yield rice and wheat production targets were achieved, and the production of these two crops increased by 75 per cent. Besides, the market for agricultural products began to develop aiming for an efficient distribution system. Another noteworthy initiative of Bangabandhu was land reform for agriculture. To materialize this goal, Bangabandhu undertook significant steps towards land reform through the promulgation of “Ordinance 98” in 1972. For major institutional reforms, Bangabandhu established Cotton Development Board, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council as well as reconstituted Rice Research Institute, Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture, Bangladesh
Agricultural Research Institute, etc. Besides, Horticulture Board, Seed Certification Agency, Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation and Rubber Development Program were reformed during his tenure. Also, the former Jute Agricultural Research Laboratory was turned into Jute Research Institute through the Jute Act.

To modernize agriculture and agro-based industries, the availability of advanced technologies and agricultural machinery are inevitable. During the post-liberation period, peasants were very poor and lacked financial soundness. Due to lack of required financing, often peasants looked for high-cost borrowing from non-institutional sources. Bangabandhu felt the agony of the Bangladeshi peasants and to emancipate them from the trap of traditional high-cost borrowing, he established a specialized government bank named “Bangladesh Krishi Bank” through the President’s Order No 27 of 1973. This remarkable initiative freed the peasants from the unbearable exploitation by the Mohajons and other high-cost non-institutional sources. Bangabandhu also inaugurated a National Award named “Bangabandhu Award” for the best performing agricultural workers/promoters for their contribution to agricultural development. Bangabandhu also stressed the importance of agricultural education and research. During the FFYP, He allotted 33 crore taka for education and research in this sector.

Irrigation is an integral part of sustainable agriculture and crop production. Realizing this importance, Bangabandhu arranged irrigation facilities for 80 lakh acre agricultural land by installing 20,000 power pumps. The information on irrigated land from 1971-72 to 1974-75 are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Amount of Irrigated Land (in Acre)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971-72</td>
<td>25,87,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972-73</td>
<td>29,92,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973-74</td>
<td>32,02,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>35,61,472</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bangabandhu always tried to ease the burden of the peasants. He believed that agricultural production would slow down if the country fails to avert the impact of flooding. Having this in mind, Bangabandhu signed the Farakka Treaty on 18 April 1975. Under this treaty, the conditions were set in such a manner that India would withdraw 11,000 to 16,000 cusec water in the dry season of April-May, whereas Bangladesh would get 44,000 cusec water. It was a great achievement for the agricultural sector of Bangladesh. Bangabandhu considered the peasants and labourers as invaluable to the development of society. He wanted to redistribute the money, resources, land, and power of the bourgeoisie to the general people through attaining economic prosperity. Bangabandhu formed the “Bangladesh Krishok Shromik Awami League (BaKSHAL)” to make all bureaucrats, businessmen, intellectuals, students and teachers stand by the side of the poor workers and peasants for the development of the country. On 25 January 1975, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman presented the fourth amendment of the Constitution to replace the existing parliamentary system with BAKSHAL. It was considered as the second revolution. The major goal of this second revolution was economic freedom for the people of Bangladesh.

Bangabandhu’s role in improving the livelihoods of the peasants, poor and marginalized people was praiseworthy. In the first constitution of independent Bangladesh, Bangabandhu took the utmost care to protect the rights of the peasants. Paragraph 14 (emancipation of peasants and workers) of the second part of the constitution that deals with the fundamental principles of state policy quotes, “it shall be a fundamental responsibility of the State to emancipate the toiling masses the peasants and workers and backward sections of the people from all forms of exploitation”. Besides, paragraph 16 states, “the State shall adopt effective measures to bring about a radical transformation in the rural areas through the promotion of an agricultural revolution, the provision of rural electrification, the development of cottage and other industries, and the improvement of education, communications, and public health, in those areas, so as progressively to remove the disparity in the standards of living between the urban and the rural area”. Bangabandhu also vouched for the public ownership of resources. Cooperative ownership had been stressed in the constitution. He believed that cooperatives could help to free the
workers, peasants, and underdeveloped factions of the society from all forms of exploitation. Bangabandhu did not limit the concept of cooperatives within constitution. He mainstreamed it within the development planning framework of Bangladesh, e.g., namely Five-Year Plan. Bangabandhu viewed cooperatives as a strategic measure to ensure equality across society through the development of the peasants and establishment of rights for the exploited groups. He declared to establish cooperatives in every village.

Bangabandhu perceived that agriculture would not only provide required food supplies to the people of Bangladesh, but it would also remain as a principal source of income in the years to come. The agriculture sector was expected not only to serve as a backward linkage for the industrial but also played a major role in eliminating poverty from the grass-root level. Bangabandhu's lifelong dream was to bring a smile to the face of the exploited, deprived, and neglected peasants through rendering the highest importance and priority to the agricultural sector. However, the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu and his family on 15 August 1971 caused a major setback in the path of agricultural development, and the progress of agriculture had been thwarted at least for two decades onwards.

Notes

From Aid Dependency to Trade Orientation: Bangladesh’s Transformative Journey

Mustafizur Rahman

1. Context of the Discourse

Bangladesh’s transition from a predominantly aid-dependent country to a trading nation is a key transformative achievement in its journey over the past five decades. One of the significant features of Bangladesh’s First Five-Year Plan (FFYP) 1973-78, which reflected Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s vision about the future Bangladesh, was to make the country self-reliant and to reduce its overwhelming dependency on foreign aid. Bangabandhu was able to govern only for three and half years and much of his attention had to be diverted to the rehabilitation of more than 10 million uprooted people and rebuilding the war-torn economy. At the same time, Bangabandhu’s government got on with the herculean task of laying the foundations of a welfare economy. The enormity of this task was revealed in the doubts expressed by a large number of development thinkers who questioned viability of Bangladesh as an economy and as a country.

In the 1970s, it was strongly felt by many that Bangladesh would be a permanent basket case, meaning that the country would be perennially condemned to be dependent on the rich countries with a begging bowl. As
it happens, one of the very first books on Bangladesh, published in the seventies, was titled Bangladesh: The Test Case for Development. The authors explained that they had titled the book “The Test Case for Development”, rather than “A test Case for Development” because they believed that if development was possible in this country then it would be possible in any other country. The reason for this, they felt, was that the country was born with so many disadvantages—destroyed infrastructure, high density of population, poverty (at the time about 80 per cent people lived below the poverty line), acute food shortages, no natural resources—that it would be almost impossible for it to survive and sustain without a continuous flow of aid money. Bangladesh can now say with a sense of pride and fulfilment, and in no uncertain terms, that its development narrative has proved the authors wrong.

The paper is divided into four sections. Following the introductory section, the next section reviews the transition of the Bangladesh’s economy from aid dependency to trade orientation. The following section highlights some of the key challenges in the way forward, particularly in view of Bangladesh’s upcoming graduation from the group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to be effective from 2026. The last section concludes with some final remarks.

2. Transition from Aid to Trade

During the Pakistan era, the Paris consortium meeting was the key annual event where developed countries and development-oriented institutions used to make aid pledge for the year. It was tied with aid, fraught with conditionalities and subject to political manipulation and pressure. This was a fate that Bangabandhu was determined to avoid. Taking over the helms of power in 1972, Bangabandhu set the course for a self-reliant economy with an increasingly reduced dependence on foreign aid. In his economic pronouncements, Bangabandhu stated his government’s strong support for building an industrial base which would cater to the domestic demand and also be geared to accessing regional and global market opportunities. The FFYP 1973-78 articulated a number of supportive policies and measures to this end. This plan, prepared by the first Bangladesh Planning Commission, of which Bangabandhu was the
chairman, articulated a vision where share of aid in GDP would come
down, and earnings from exports, not aid money, would underwrite import
expenditure. The plan envisaged diversification of the export, both intra-
\text{jute and beyond jute, with emphasis on industrialization, albeit a public
sector led one, and increasingly greater domestic value addition.}

Today, looking back from the vantage point of March 2021, one is able
to appreciate how, through trials and tribulations, and successive policy
changes as well as the transition from aid to trade has taken place over
these past years.\footnote{To recall, even in the 1990s, Bangladesh’s export
and aid ratio was 1:1; to compare, in the pre-pandemic year of 2018-19
Bangladesh’s export was US$40.5 billion, and earnings from remittance
was another US$16 billion as against the aid flow of about US$5 billion.}

At present, Bangladesh’s earnings from exports and remittance is more
than ten times that of the aid disbursed. Considering to what extent
Bangladesh is able to underwrite its import expenditure with the country’s
export earnings, one finds that the two figures are almost the same at
present. Accumulated debt currently stands at about US$65 billion which
was less than 20 per cent of the country’s current GDP of about US$350
billion.\footnote{Debt servicing, at about US$2. billion annually is equivalent to
only about 3 per cent of Bangladesh’s annual export of goods and services.
Today, a significant share of industrial output and employment, forex
reserves and the overall GDP growth performances hinge critically on
performance of the export-oriented sector.}

There have been many contributing factors which have driven the
transition from aid to trade.\footnote{Firstly, policies mattered. Supportive
initiatives pursued by successive governments have played an important
role in this transition. Introduction of bonded warehouse facilities, back to
back LCs and cash compensation schemes were bold steps that triggered
the rise of export-oriented apparels sector of Bangladesh. Incentives for
product and market diversification, industrial policies and support for
backward linkage industries, often going against advice of some of the
development partners, have contributed to domestic value addition,
emergence of Bangladesh’s entrepreneurial class and the country’s vibrant
export-oriented activities. Secondly, capacity to realize global market
access opportunities mattered. It is Bangladesh’s distinctive credit that it
was amongst only a few being able to take substantive advantage of the
global market opportunities and the preferential market access offered to them. Today, 70 per cent of Bangladesh’s export items enter the global market under various types of preferential arrangements. Thirdly, entrepreneurship mattered. Bangladesh’s nascent entrepreneurial class rose to the challenge and helped the country make the transition from a primary resource-based exporter to a manufactured product-based exporter. A new generation of entrepreneurs have emerged with footprints in the global markets of goods and services from a position of strength. Dependence on jute and tea was replaced by the predominance of such industrial items as apparels, home textiles, agro-processed food, pharmaceuticals and leather goods in the export basket; today, these products account for about 90 per cent of the country’s export earnings. Fourthly, our workers mattered. Post-independence success of export-oriented activities owed much to our dedicated work force who, inspite of formidable difficulties, kept the wheels of our factories going. They worked hand in hand with our entrepreneurs, with the women workers taking the lead in the early years, particularly in export-oriented apparels sector.

All these factors combined to help transform Bangladesh’s country’s comparative advantages into competitive advantages, leading to the emergence of our resilient, vibrant and competitive export sector. Through this transition from aid to trade, Bangladesh has been able to not only create opportunities for raising income and standard of living of the people but also experienced social empowerment. It needs to be recognized that the transition from aid to trade has also contributed significantly towards the dual graduation of Bangladesh. These are important milestones in Bangladesh’s post-independence journey: transition from a low-income country to a lower-middle-income country—the middle-income graduation, in 2015, and the eligibility gained in 2021 for graduation from the group of LDCs to the group of non-LDC developing countries by 2026—the LDC graduation. The transmission channels through which the transition from aid to trade, had impacted on the economy were direct as also indirect through multiplier impacts on the economy.

However, how Bangladesh now prepares for the future will matter. There is a need to correctly anticipate what the next challenges are going
to be in view of our future journey as a dual-graduated trading nation. Bangladesh will need to take adequate preparations keeping the risks and rewards in the perspective. Will the future be a linear progression and mere extension of the past? The answer is a clear and resounding “No”. The upcoming LDC graduation, and the middle income transition will entail formidable new challenges. These will primarily relate to four areas: market access, relationship with development partners, domestic policy space and enforcement compliance.

3. The Next Challenges

Graduation from developing country status is a reflection of Bangladesh’s commendable success in terms of key socio-economic indicators of development, and also an international recognition of this success. In view of the opportunities that came with the LDC status, the post-independence government of Bangabandhu initiated discussion in the World Trade Organization (WTO) for Bangladesh’s inclusion in the group of the LDCs. This turned out to be a reality when Bangladesh became a member of the LDC sub-strata among the developing countries in December 1975. In this year of the jubilee celebration of our independence, a timeline has finally been set for moving out of the group of LDCs, in 2026, after five decades as an LDC. Also to note that the country has been able to reach this point by meeting all the three graduation criteria at the two successive reviews by the UN Committee for Development Policy (CDP), in 2018 and 2021.8 This is indeed a most impressive achievement and an important milestone in our country’s post-independence journey.

Graduation to developing country status should be seen as both an opportunity and a challenge. Bangladesh, hence, needs to take adequate preparation to reap the benefits and address the challenges that this transition will entail. Graduation from LDC group is, no doubt, a manifestation of strong foundation of the Bangladesh economy in important areas which the country will be able to take advantage of in going forward. LDC graduation is expected to generate dividends in the form of global branding and image (positive changes), risk perception (lowered) and credit rating (improved, which should be helpful in raising funds through issuance of sovereign bond on the part of the government.
Preparing for Graduation with Momentum

Graduation will entail addressing and overcoming challenges in a number of key areas. Indeed, Bangladesh will need to graduate with momentum if the graduation is to be sustainable. As may be recalled, the respective values of Human Asset Index (HAI) and Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI), which used to be moving averages, were fixed at the 2012 level (at 66 and above and 32 and below respectively). Also, HAI and EVI indices and associated sub-indices do not include many elements of competitiveness and structural changes which are key to sustainable graduation. For example, HAI includes literacy rate and school enrolment but does not include quality of education and human resources and skills composition of the labour force. Many structural factors, such as productivity of labour and capital, level of technology penetration and preparedness for the opportunities of the new economy as against the traditional economy, are not captured by these criteria. LDC graduation criteria refer to only average numbers and not distribution aspects. The GNI per capita criteria is a pertinent example in this connection. Despite the rise in average income, the distribution scenario has worsened in Bangladesh over the past years as indicated by the gini-coefficient of income distribution.

Accordingly, Bangladesh should make best use of the next five years to ensure continuation of current positive trends (smooth graduation), garner strengths to ensure acceleration of growth (graduation with momentum) and make graduation robust and an irreversible process (sustainable graduation). A road map with timeline, actions and responsible actors will need to be designed and implemented keeping these challenging tasks in the perspective.

Implications of LDC Graduation

The impact of LDC graduation will be felt, broadly speaking, in four areas: (a) changes in market access scenario; (b) in dealings with trade and development partners; (c) policy flexibilities and (d) compliance
enforcement. The first two primarily concern regional and global space and interface, while the last two concern domestic space and policymaking. In view of the aforementioned areas, four transitions will be called for towards sustainable LDC graduation of Bangladesh: (a) transition from preferential market access-driven competitive strengths to productivity and skills-driven competitive strengths; (b) transition from non-reciprocity to reciprocity in dealings with external partners; (c) transition from flexibility-driven policy space to obligation-driven policy space; and (d) transition from weak compliance enforcement to more stringent enforcement of compliances.

**Market Access**

Following the LDC graduation, Bangladesh’s market access scenario will change quite significantly. At present, the country enjoys duty free-quota free (DF-QF) market access for almost all items in most developed countries including the European Union (EU), Canada, Japan and the US (except for apparels) as also in a number of developing countries including India, Japan and South Korea and many others. On graduation, in 2026, Bangladesh will no longer be eligible for DF-QF market access. In the EU, however, market access under the EU’s everything but arms-EBA-initiative for the LDCs will continue for an additional three years, till 2029. True, Bangladesh will be eligible for preferential market access under various Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) schemes applicable for the developing countries. But, the preferences in terms of reduced tariff under these schemes are not as deep and as wide-ranging as those for the LDCs. Also the Rules of Origin (RoO) will be much more stringent. RoO are much more stringent under the respective GSP schemes of these economies for which developing countries are eligible.

Estimates indicate that the impact of loss of preferential access will be quite significant for Bangladesh. The country has been among the very few LDCs which were able to reap most benefits originating from preferential market access offered by the developed and developing countries. Consequently, it also has the most to lose. 70 per cent of the country’s global exports are covered by preferential access, the highest
among the LDCs. A probable solution can be where importers of Bangladeshi apparels are required to pay customs duties while Vietnam will be able to enjoy duty-free market access, thanks to its membership in various trading blocs: in Canada, thanks to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP); in the thanks to the EU-Vietnam bilateral free trade agreement (FTA); and in China, Japan and Australia, thanks to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The difference in price terms could be as high as 20-25 per cent tariff equivalent since average tariffs on apparels tend to be high compared to most other items in most developed countries (ranging between 10-15 per cent).

What should be the strategy for us in this backdrop? For the importer, price offered by the exporter and import duties are major considerations. The strategy for the exporter will need to be to raise price-competitiveness through reduction in costs of production to compensate for the loss of tariff preferences. Cost structure includes three elements: within enterprises (labour cost, productivity and efficiency, management quality, etc.), outside enterprises (financial costs, transport cost, logistics, trade facilitation) and macroeconomic policy and macroeconomic management-induced costs (exchange rate; doing business environment; regulatory regime, taxes and duties, incentive structure). In order to reduce these cost elements to compensate for the additional costs stemming from the duties imposed, Bangladesh will need to take targeted steps. Export and market diversification has to be ensured by translating comparative advantage into competitive advantages through upgradation of process and products and by way of improving labour and capital productivity. A Technology Upgradation Fund can be created to support entrepreneurs in this regard.14 A supportive environment will be required where Bangladesh’s investors feel stimulated, encouraged and incentivized to invest, keeping in the purview opportunities in domestic and global markets, and the emerging global demand scenario. Attracting FDI through triangulation of investment, transport logistics and trade connectivities will be key to product and market diversification. Development of regional value chains and production networks will be called for. Transport corridors will need to be transformed into economic corridors by establishing industrial parks and by taking advantage of the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) that are
being built at present. Trade and tariff policies will need to be reformed and revised to make these WTO-compatible. With the help of policies and carefully crafted incentives, Bangladesh will need to promote product and market diversification. Bangladesh will be required to aggressively pursue Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) type of negotiations with partners who matter.

A proposition for support measures favouring the graduating LDCs has already been floated in the WTO. The proposal urges for continuation of international support measures (ISM) to graduated LDCs for additional twelve years (following graduation). As may be recalled, Bangladesh mission in Geneva has played an important role in giving shape to this proposal which was placed by Chad on behalf of the LDC group at the WTO General Council meeting held in December 2020. The UN Resolution in support of graduation should be reminded in this context where it was mentioned that graduation is a milestone and not a destination.

**Implications of LDC Graduation in View of Selected WTO Agreements**

There is an urgent need to identify the WTO Agreement specific impacts of LDC graduation and the flexibilities that Bangladesh can take advantage as a developing country member of the WTO. It is pertinent to recall here that most WTO Agreements have flexibilities in place for the developing country members for which Bangladesh will be eligible on graduation.

In view of the Agreement on Agriculture, Bangladesh will no longer be able to provide export credit subsidy and will need to take a number of obligations to meet the requirements of the Agreement as a developing country member. However, if Bangladesh can convince WTO members that it is a net food importing developing country (NFIDC), which it is, it will be allowed to continue with many of the flexibilities which LDCs are eligible for.

As is known, the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and Public Health decision of the WTO allow the LDCs flexibility in areas of patents and licensing requirements (effective till end-2032). Bangladesh has made good use of TRIPS flexibilities and associated
waivers for the LDCs. Ninety Seven per cent of the US$3 billion domestic market of Bangladesh catered to by local producers, mostly by local companies (these accounted for more than 90 per cent domestic production as against the multinationals). About 20 per cent of the drugs produced in the country are generic versions of patented drugs which have particularly benefitted from the TRIPS flexibilities. Import restrictions and price regulations are also in place in Bangladesh at present in support of the pharma sector. On graduation, in 2026, Bangladesh will cease to enjoy these derogations from the TRIPS discipline (although the LDC flexibilities will continue to be in force till the end of 2032). The adverse impacts will be felt on export-oriented as also domestic market-oriented pharma industry. For example, according to some studies, local insulin prices could rise by as high as eight times if patenting and licensing requirements are enforced. To make the relevant policies WTO compatible, Bangladesh will need to change its patent laws and license granting procedures that are currently in place. The API park must be put into full gear without delay in view of the challenging future scenario. At the same time, Bangladesh should actively pursue the proposal for extension of TRIPS flexibility for the graduated LDCs till end of 2032 which was floated at the TRIPS Council meeting held in December 2020.

In the context of LDC services waiver, WTO members agreed to provide preferential treatment to services and service providers from the LDCs including through preferential market access. The waiver is currently valid till the end of 2030. In view of request lists (by LDCs) and offer lists (by provider-members), 24 WTO members have already come up with waiver notification that covers a wide range of areas and all four modes of services. However, these are yet to be operationalized. Bangladesh’s graduation (in 2026) is to take place earlier than the timeline of the waiver (in 2030). On graduation, Bangladesh will cease to enjoy the benefits under the GATS and the operationalization of the waiver. Bangladesh has opened only a few sectors in services (e.g., five-star hotels; IT sector; foreign banks) but will be required to open more sectors once it graduates.

There is a dedicated fund for LDCs, LDC Fund (LDCF) for climate related assistance. Support from this earmarked fund will no longer be available. However, Bangladesh will continue to have access to Special
Climate Fund (SCCF) and Green Climate Fund (GCF) since these are open to all vulnerable developing countries.\textsuperscript{17} These funds will need to be accessed in a more proactive manner. Also, during the interim period Bangladesh should try to access more resources from the LDCF since projects negotiated earlier can continue to be implemented even after graduation.

There are a number of support measures in place for graduated LDCs which should be taken full advantage of by Bangladesh. Following graduation, graduated LDCs will continue to receive support from the Technology Bank for the LDCs, for an additional five years. Aid for trade under the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), which is exclusively earmarked for the LDCs for institutional and capacity-building support, will be extended for an additional window of five years following graduation of concerned LDCs. However, the current phase of the EIF programme will run only till 2022 (with implementation of projects supported allowed till 2024).\textsuperscript{18} This state of affairs obviously limits the potential use of EIF by Bangladesh following graduation. To ensure continuation of the support under the EIF, Bangladesh (and other graduating LDCs) should actively support initiatives at MC12 for additional funding for the EIF (which will allow the country to receive support from the EIF beyond 2026, for an additional five years as was stated above).\textsuperscript{19}

Bangladesh's middle-income graduation (from LIC to LMIC, that took place in 2015) entails more stringent conditionalities in view of receiving aid (lower grant element, higher interest rate; lower maturity period; lower grace period). Bangladesh will soon graduate from the category of a “blend country” to a “non-blend country” (according to the World Bank criteria). This will result in more stringent aid conditionalities at a time when it will need more foreign aid and resources to prepare for LDC graduation.

**Build Negotiating Capacity**

In trade related discussions, countries get not what they deserve but what they negotiate. Bangladesh may have to give the highest priority to build its negotiating capacity in view of the emerging post-LDC scenario. Going for comprehensive economic partnership type of Agreements, based on
reciprocity (which would entail providing access to our own market as well) and dealing with complex trade issues (tariff and trade liberalization; opening of sectors for foreign investment; labour and environment standards compliance; preparing offer lists and request lists) will entail adequate preparation and sound analytical work and wide ranging discussion with concerned stakeholders including business.\textsuperscript{20} As was pointed out earlier, India and China, ASEAN and RCEP are possible regional countries and groupings with most potential benefits, but also the most challenging from the point of negotiation. Our key strategy should be to attract investment to build value-chains and production networks to take advantage of preferential market access originating from bilateral free trade agreements (BFTAs) and CEPAs to be negotiated. Linking these negotiations to harness the potentialities of the SEZs currently being established in Bangladesh will be the key here, through triangulation of trade, transport and investment connectivities. To undertake the complex negotiations successfully, it is proposed that a Negotiation Cell, equipped with adequate human-analytical-technical resources and capacities, be established similar to the WTO Cell in the Ministry of Commerce.

4. Concluding Remarks

While implications of the dual graduation will entail new challenges for Bangladesh in going forward, this itself also speaks of Bangladesh’s demonstrated capacity to rise up to these challenges. Indeed, this gives us the strength and confidence in our ability to translate our potentials into realities. To recall, one of the four pillars of Bangladesh’s constitution, which embodies Bangabandhu’s vision of Bangladesh was socialism. Not merely the idea of economic growth but the aspirations of distributive justice and fairness were embedded in this vision. This would imply that Bangladesh’s transition from aid to trade ought to be informed by fair distribution of fruits of this transition as was envisioned by Bangabandhu. The Perspective Plan, Vision 2041, which the government has formulated and with which it was my good fortune to be associated with, speaks about a socially inclusive Bangladesh which is aligned with this vision of Bangabandhu. The Perspective Plan aspires Bangladesh to be an advanced country by 2041, a country which is not only economically developed but
also socially inclusive. The sustainable development goals, implementation of which Bangladesh is committed to, talk about environmental sustainability. The aspiration before Bangladesh is thus to transform itself into a social welfare state founded on the principles of just society and just distribution. If this is to be the case, Bangladesh’s export sector and trading activities must be geared to creating better and decent jobs for the millions of young people joining the workforce every year. Workers should be able to earn living wages and opportunities of upward social mobility. Bangladesh’s future journey as a trading nation must be informed and embedded by these goals.

Bangladesh’s transition from aid to trade has indeed been an impressive achievement by any measure. It is now time to successfully address the next generation of challenges originating from this transition, towards an economically developed, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable Bangladesh marching forward in the twenty-first century. Bangladesh’s success in addressing these challenges and in attaining these aspirations will be the best homage that we can pay to Bangabandhu, in this year of his birth centenary, by being faithful to his legacy, and committed to his dreams about Bangladesh.
Notes


2. Ibid.


5. For the implications of the incentives for workers in the current scenario, see Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and BRAC Institute for Governance and Development (BIGD), PPRC-BIGD 2nd Rapid Response Research Livelihoods, Coping and Recovery During COVID-19 Crisis, 2020; and, Centre for Policy Dialogue, Employment Implications of Stimulus Packages Challenges for Recovery (PowerPoint Slides), 2020, available at https://cpd.org.bd/only-8-of-employed-population-reached-through-stimulus-packages/, accessed on 02 February 2021.


7. Fahmida Khatun et al., op. cit.


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11 Mustafizur Rahman and Debapriya Bhattacharya, *LDC Graduation Process: Can SSC Play an Impactful Role?*, A paper prepared under the project *South-South Global Thinkers: A Global Coalition of Think Tank Networks* for SSC for UNDP and UNOSSC, 2020.

12 Ibid.

13 Mustafizur Rahman and Estiaque Bari, op. cit.


19 For the Seventh and Eight Five Year Plans, see “Seventh Five Year Plan: FY2016 - FY2020”, available at http://www.plancomm.gov.bd/site/files/2eb8022b-d4fb-42e1-

Development Trajectories and Imperatives for Vision 2041

Mahfuz Kabir

“To build a Golden Bengal, we need Golden People. Bangladesh is plagued by exploitation, oppression, and looting. To solve these problems and to build a happy and prosperous Bangladesh, the people need to work hard to increase production.”

“We will turn this war-ravaged country into a golden one. In the future, mothers will smile, and children will play ... We can surely rebuild the country through hard work...”

— Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

1. Introduction
The Father of Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the greatest Bengali of all time, envisioned Bangladesh as an independent country on the world map. Bangabandhu immensely contributed to the development of Bangladesh even before the Liberation War. In the year 1966, he proposed the Six-Point Movement for greater autonomy of East Pakistan.
In that movement, the main agenda was to stop the exploitation of the West Pakistani rulers towards the people of East Pakistan. Awami League’s 1970 election manifesto became the inspiration and policy direction for the post-liberation economy. Through labour-intensive productivity growth, nationalization of pre-liberation industries, and improving efficiency, productivity and profitability, Bangabandhu envisioned the construction of his *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal). While emphasizing unequivocally the importance of human capital to create a nation’s wealth, Bangabandhu took historic measures to enhance the country’s health sector, literacy rate, and social equality. The keywords of Bangabandhu’s thoughts on development include concepts of hard work, increased production, and bringing smiles to the faces of the mothers and the children. His political agenda was to eradicate poverty, improve the standard of living of the poor, remora hunger, and ensure the food and nutritional security of the mass. He has always imagined Bangladesh as a developed nation and regional hub like ‘Switzerland of the East’.

This paper aims at analyzing Bangabandhu’s thoughts of development in broader perspective, going beyond merely economic development of the country. It highlights that his thoughts of development are conceptually akin to the modern notion of human development vis-à-vis a balanced track of economic development. He also viewed poverty from multiple dimensions that included deprivation from education including human capital (viz. “golden people”), deficiency of healthcare and nutrition, and lack of decent living, all of which are now included in the concept of multidimensional poverty. He emphasized on industrialization and creating jobs, promoting inclusion and social justice, and transforming the economy into a connectivity hub. Finally, the paper outlines a way forward to achieve the overarching national “Vision 2041” to become a developed nation based on his thoughts on development.

2. **Bangabandhu’s Thoughts on Development**

Two ideals led Bangabandhu towards politics. First, the emancipation of the working class and eradication of poverty and inequality. The welfare of the working class and access to education had also been prioritized by the national leader during his early political career, where he envisioned a
developed *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal) flourished in and furnished with equality. In 1966, Bangabandhu announced his famous Six-point Movement where he promised economic freedom for Bangalis from the West Pakistani oligarchy. After the War of Liberation, Bangabandhu had to govern a war-torn, poverty-stricken country with over seven crore people looking up to him as the sole hope of the nation for a better tomorrow. In the first council session of the Awami League of independent Bangladesh on 07-08 April 1972, Bangabandhu reiterated his commitment to promoting an exploitation-free socio-economic system. His sole purpose in his life was to build *Sonar Bangla* and to put “smile on the faces of the weak and unhappy people”.

In the 1970 election manifesto, Bangabandhu provided the following policy direction for the post-liberation economy:

a. Promoting agrarian reforms;
b. Reviving the industrial economy;
c. Formulating the First Five-Year Plan (FFYP) 1973-78;
d. Establishing independent relations with external partners;
e. Laying the foundations for a more independent Bangladesh-India relationship.

In the 1970s, the share of agriculture in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Bangladesh was around 60 per cent, and the industry and services sector only had a small share. The industrialization in Bangladesh started weakly. Bangladesh had a severe backlog from the industrialization of the Pakistan era. However, Bangabandhu’s vision for a prosperous, poverty and exploitation-free Bangladesh was at its genesis. His FFYP (1973-1978) focussed on poverty reduction, increased GDP growth rate, and self-sufficiency in foodgrain production. Revitalizing industries and increased agricultural production were some of the fundamental aims for this FFYP through human resource development and introduction of free labour programmes. In the prologue of the FFYP, Bangabandhu wrote, “No plan, however well-formulated, can be implemented unless there is a total commitment on the part of the country’s people to work hard and make necessary sacrifices. All of us have to dedicate ourselves to the task of nation-building with single-minded determination.” The foremost priority for the FFYP was to reduce
poverty and inequality in the society. Land reform policies, planning for industrialization, development of education, efforts to create accessible health care, facilities for mothers and infants, as well as development-oriented planning and policies were undertaken by Bangabandhu to establish a better Bangladesh in the future.

"My young brothers...success of this cooperative movement in Bangladesh will decide the fate of Bangla...full pants must get into half pants...have to change pajamas into lungi...and have to move to rural areas for the success of this village cooperatives...Every citizen is needed for the success....", he said in 1975 while announcing the programme for the massive economic development aiming at robust socio-economic changes in the post-liberation Bangladesh. Bangabandhu initiated this plan of action to recover the country from mass poverty and revive the ill-equipped economy. In the same speech, Bangabandhu emphasized growth in the national economy to end the misery of the people of Bangladesh. "I asked for double results from you...double production from farmlands, double production from mills and factories." He urged support from the youth, workers, peasants, and government officials to craft his vision for labour-intensive industries like jute and tea. Taking into account policies for productivity and growth, Bangabandhu soon realized that the massive population of Bangladesh could be turned into assets by implementing labour-intensive programmes through robust planning. Nationalization of pre-liberation industries that were left abandoned or closed due to war was kick-started to improve efficiency, productivity and profitability. These programmes were committed to building a more egalitarian, self-reliant economy and poverty-free nation. With the planning, Bangabandhu started to build up a robust public sector. His government initiated massive governance reforms in the economy to put Bangladesh on the track of economic development. Upon returning to Bangladesh, Bangabandhu said,

"I cannot give you anything for the next three years...Conditions are to be created to emancipate the toiling masses from the forces of exploitation; every citizen is to enjoy the right to work...All citizens are to be assured equal opportunities so that an egalitarian society can be established."

Bangabandhu included socialism in the constitution to ensure economic equality for Bangladesh as he pointed out, "Enjoyment of
uneared income is to be discouraged, and there will be limits of private ownership of means of production as prescribed by law.”

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made sacrifice his life for the nation. Until his last breath, he wanted to establish a poverty-free, inequality-free, hunger-free prosperous Bangladesh— the *Sonar Bangla*.

### 3. Human Development and Eradication of Multidimensional Poverty

Measuring development has always been a debated issue since its inception. It has contributed to developing a new pedagogy of measurement and forming new sets of indices in recent years. Among those, the human development index (HDI) and multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI) are notable. These two aims explain peoples’ actual progress, which many scholars denote as “true development”.

Both the indices aim to explore the health, education, and standard of living of citizens of a country. Development of health is measured by life expectancy; educational progress by expected years of schooling of children at school-entry age and mean years of education of the adult population; and finally, the standard of living by Gross National Income (GNI) per capita adjusted for the price level of the country.

The idea of human development is well connected with Amartya Sen’s capability approach, where he focusses more on freedom enjoyed by an individual. He states that it is the freedom of individuals which ensures proper development, or what is known as human development. However, a rudimentary approach cannot be used in developing an index of human poverty as the lives of human beings can be blighted and impoverished in quite different ways. Indeed, the HDI examines the various quality of life features and arrives at an aggregate judgment on the extent of overall deprivation of the impoverished.

Multidimensional poverty embraces a diverse range of characteristics. In most cases, not all poor-income individuals are multidimensionally poor, and not all multidimensionally poor individuals are income-poor. This indicates that monetary-based poverty measures can miss a lot and non-monetary measures of poverty are needed alongside the monetary-based measurement to address the multidimensional needs and
deprivations faced by poor populations depending on their geographical, social, and economic situations. Multidimensional poverty measures are needed to create a more comprehensive picture. A person with a poverty line personal income can still be deprived for being illiterate, suffering from health vulnerabilities causing early mortality, being out of essential service like sanitation, as well as often being deprived of information and communication facilities. The multidimensional view of poverty and deprivation shows income-based poverty measures cannot serve the purpose. It reveals who the poor are and how they are poor through the range of different disadvantages they experience considering the poverty level in other areas of a country and various sub-groups.

**Bangabandhu’s Thoughts on Human Development**

For Bangabandhu, the concept of “Golden Bengal” was more than just political bluster. The lack of natural resources compelled the country to develop and execute economically viable plans to convert its massive population into human resources. He began implementing his plans to restore a war-torn nation immediately after the independence in 1971 and shortly after the formation of the government on 12 January 1972.

Bangabandhu prioritized developing human capital by taking education, health and economic growth into concern. He made specific pledges about these sectors. He anticipated that four per cent of GDP should be dedicated to public education, a demand still being made today, in 2021. Emphatically, he emphasized that illiteracy had to be eradicated from the country. He planned a cash transfer programme of compulsory and free primary education to enrol all five-year-old children. Bangabandhu stated unequivocally that its citizens must be converted into human capital to create a wealthy nation. The only way to do so was to formulate a time-appropriate education system and ensure everyone had access to it. In the Constitution, Bangabandhu recognized health as a fundamental need. Designed by the vision of Bangabandhu, the post-independence period reforms of the health sector brought about pragmatic changes in the country’s health sector. In addition, the right to proper rest, recreation, leisure and government assistance in the event of sickness or inability were recognized in the Constitution. Bangabandhu also acknowledges the
importance of nutrition and public health, which eventually highlights the remedy of nutrition and public health problems as one of the critical responsibilities of the state. He urged local pharmaceuticals to manufacture drugs and simultaneously nationalized dispensaries and hospitals to provide medical care to the masses. It was Bangabandhu who formed the Department of Family Planning to monitor the country’s rapid population growth. Nonetheless, he took steps for food production and nutrition and arranged special honoraria for doctors, nurses and other healthcare staff. The improvement of average life expectancy from 46.51 years in 1972 to almost 73 years in 2021 ushers the pragmatism in the pathway that Bangabandhu had designed and reinvigorated in Bangladesh’s health sector.

Bangabandhu’s vision for a stable and inclusive Bangladesh was accurately expressed in the Republic’s 1972 Constitution. After the independence, he inherited an economy worth only US$8 billion, and Bangladesh’s foreign exchange reserve at that time was empty. But he was fully committed to guiding the country in proper direction and was well on his way. He was able to materialize Bangladesh’s growth potential significantly just a few years after independence. Bangabandhu correctly prioritized agriculture and industrialization as the forces on which to depend. He recognized that agriculture would provide food for the population and be the primary source of income for most people for many years to come. Also, a thriving agricultural sector can ensure a steady supply of raw materials for the growing manufacturing industry. Bangabandhu was also aware of the farming and industrial sectors’ interdependence. For example, fertilizers were essential for agricultural inputs; and for that, Bangabandhu prioritized the establishment and operation of fertilizer factories throughout the country. Bangabandhu understood that there was no other choice than industrialization. Industrial development was needed to produce products for domestic consumption and exports, and improve the standard of living through higher income and modernization of the economy. However, with no foreign reserves, no foreign investment, very few backward and forward linkages, and, most importantly, very few citizens with entrepreneurial experience, industrialization was perhaps the most challenging task that Bangabandhu had to face immediately after independence.
Bangladesh has come a long way over the past fifty years, and it has formulated two perspective plans to achieve Vision 2021 in order to become a middle-income country and Vision 2041 to emerge as an industrially developed country in line with Bangabandhu’s dream of Sonar Bangla.

**Bangabandhu’s Thoughts on Eradication of Multidimensional Poverty**

"Let us together create a world that can eradicate poverty, hunger, war, and human sufferings and achieve global peace and security for the well-being of humanity."

— Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the UNGA in 1974

The measurement and analysis of poverty, inequality, and vulnerability are crucial for cognitive, analytical, policy making, as well as monitoring and evaluation purposes. This situation is more adverse when Bangabandhu got a war-ravaged country with broken physical infrastructure. The economy in shambles, millions of hungry people, and challenges arising out of complicated geopolitics. Yet, he did not lose hope.

Bangabandhu perceived poverty from a broader perspective and associated it with not only insufficient income or consumption but also bad outcomes concerning health, nutrition, literacy, deficient social relations, insecurity, and low self-esteem and powerlessness, which gives a new dimension of social exclusion. Considering the future development journey of a war-tarn country, he led the formation of the Planning Commission, which brought out the FFYP within the record time of a year and a half after the liberation of Bangladesh. It is indeed unusual for a country to formulate a five-year national development plan within such a short time. Poverty reduction was also the core objective of the FFYP, which included a clear statement within its twelve goals that poverty alleviation is the foremost objective of the plan. It required an expansion of employment opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed. It also required an acceleration in the growth rate of national income and effective fiscal and pricing policies for its equitable distribution. The FFYP involved restructuring existing rural institutions, effective organization of
the people, utilizing available resources and improving the local level planning process. Interestingly, these trends have been continued in all subsequent five-year plans and other development plans.28

Furthermore, many people in Bangladesh still vividly recall the 1974 famine with great sadness and often with despair. It brought untold miseries to millions and resulted in the deaths of many29, and left a deep scar in the collective psyche of the country. The famine also instilled the stereotypical notion of “poor Bangladesh ravaged by floods” in the mind of international communities. As an astute leader, Bangabandhu took some immediate steps to reconstruct the economy. He was very strict about syndicate and nepotism since oligarchy was a burning question at that time. He called international agencies for direct support, yet the distribution process was futile. Afterwards, he opened some small credit programmes to support the country’s agriculture production, and within a year, Bangladesh got feedback.30

Moreover, Bangabandhu first began overhauling the education system of the new nation by nationalizing the primary education of Bangladesh. Indeed, it was a historic decision and a decision in the right direction. There were 37 thousand primary schools at that time where approximately one hundred thousand teachers would teach. Following his plan, all the cost of running the country’s primary education was upon the government. Bangabandhu had high respect for the faculty members of the universities of Bangladesh. In 1974, he formed an eighteen-member Education Commission with the eminent scientist Dr Qudrat-i-Khuda to frame a long-term modern, progressive and human resource development-oriented education system appropriate for an independent country ensuring academic freedom and freedom of thought and expression.31

Meanwhile, Bangabandhu took some landmark steps towards the country’s health sector to bring pragmatic changes during the post-independence era. He had taken his first step to ensure the special treatment of the wounded freedom fighters for their quick recovery.32 He nationalized all charitable dispensaries across the country, including all hospitals in 17 districts, to increase the medical treatments of the citizens. Bangabandhu initiated social safety net programmes as well. He was giving allowances for the widow, deserted and destitute women, to the elderly population and so on. Bangabandhu had trust in the potential of
the Bangladeshi citizens, and he dreamt of a prosperous country where zero hungry, zero nutrition and zero illiteracy would exist. Now Bangladesh is a miracle of world development, and it will have lustre in its way.

4. Bangladesh’s Potential in Bangabandhu’s Vision

Bangabandhu always visualized Bangladesh as a land of prosperity, and the country can be the “Switzerland of the East”. It was not just rhetoric but a reality that he was an aspirant of achieving it. There are two unique dimensions of the concept “Switzerland of the East”. The first would be the great potential of Bangladesh to be a connectivity hub, and the second is that Bangladesh has all the possibilities, and it can utilize the potential to become a tourism hub.

Bangabandhu tried to balance between agricultural and industrial development. However, his primary focus was on agriculture. As men tied earlier realized that there should be a strong linkage between the two—vibrant agriculture can ensure the supply of raw materials for the industrial sector. Bangabandhu’s vision was to create large-scale jobs for the educated mass and the mass population. This vision was clearly written in his FFYP, as well as in his speeches. He emphasized mainly on labour-intensive employments, which are now reducing in the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, even though Bangabandhu always wanted people to get jobs in the industries.

Bangabandhu laid the foundation for the nation to step on the high road of development and emerge as a role model for the world. In a newly independent country with over 75 million people in 1971, there was a food shortage of around 2-3 million tons. On 13 February 1973, Bangabandhu delivered a speech at Bangladesh Agricultural University in Mymensingh where he said that development could transform the country from the “bottomless pit”. The leader said,

“We cannot ensure our expected agricultural production. We must underscore an integrated farming system to increase our food production. We must educate farmers about the latest cultivation methods, and the authority concerned must share their experiences with the farmers. Then, we can achieve our intended success.”
Bangabandhu took all the major initiatives to kick start the country’s war-torn economy starting from agricultural developments by establishing Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation, Udyan Development Board, Cotton Development Board, Seed Certification Agency, Bangladesh Sugarcane Research Institute, and Fisheries Development Corporation. Bangabandhu established Bangladesh Krishi Bank to provide farmers with low-interest and soft-term loans. His constructive thoughts and policies initiated the inclusive development of agriculture in Bangladesh. He rightly prioritized agriculture and industrialization with perfect balance to maintain sustainable economic development of post-liberation Bangladesh. Bangabandhu also created Horticulture Development Board, Bangladesh Tea Research Institute, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute, Bangladesh Rice Research Institute, etc. during his tenure.

Bangabandhu had a solid dream to revive the Bangla as Sonar Bangla. In several speeches, he mentioned, “We have so fertile land where the plant can be grown sowing seeds only and those plants give us fruits. So, why will our people suffer for food?” In another speech, he said, “Rice-bread can fill the stomach, but if we want to develop an intelligent nation, we have to ensure balanced food and nutrition for all.” These plans were incorporated in the introduction of the FFYP. This is why Bangabandhu also called for the green revolution or the “second revolution” after the Liberation War to bring people out of the curse of poverty and hunger.

Bangabandhu was not just a visionary about this green revolution; he also had profound planning for the country’s industrialization. His farsightedness was seen when he paid only 4.5 million pound-sterling to the Shell Oil Company for Bakhrabad, Titas, Rashidpur, Kailashtila, and Habiganj gas fields to ensure energy security of the country, which still produces over a quarter of the total gas. There is no other example of purchasing such a massive deposit of gas so cheaply in world history.

Bangabandhu’s futuristic vision for Bangladesh can be seen through his works. He had to work unceasingly to rebuild the country. Bangabandhu had to start from scratch as occupying force left the country’s treasury nearly empty after it had been ravaged by the nine-month war. The global community tagged Bangladesh as a politically failed state. The country had an undersized industrial and services sector with a fast-flowing
population and an overall meagre infrastructure. Bangabandhu realized that agriculture would provide food for the people; hence, the country would also need to focus on industrial development to usher in the era of new economic development.

In 1972, Bangabandhu said, "Start the movement in the fields and farms and the factories. We can rebuild the country through hard work. Let us work together so that the Golden Bengal shines again." In the same year, in a constituent assembly speech, he said, "We have to put a smile on poor people's faces. The people of Bangladesh have to survive and so require a minimum amount of food." The FFYP ensured inclusive and sustainable policies to maintain growth. Since independence, the jute mills were producing at 56 per cent of their capacities in the first year. The capacity utilization of textile mills, paper mills, and fertilizer factories was 60, 69 and 62 per cent, respectively. As an entrepreneurship-friendly person, Bangabandhu was always in support of facilitating business growth and rightly opted for state-led industrial growth in the newly liberated country. His nationalization policy encompassed the banks and insurance companies, all jute mills, sugar mills and textile mills to jump-start the economy after nine months of devastation. Pakistani forces destroyed rail lines, bridges, roads, telecommunication systems, industries, infrastructures and production and supply chain, as well as the entire economy. They also burnt the actual cash and gold reserve in the central bank just before their surrender. Earlier, they took 3 million metric ton of food grains from different warehouses. The cost of damage done to capital assets and properties only in the public sector stood at US$33 million, and the resulting loss of income was estimated at US$15 million. The damage in the agricultural sector was estimated at US$40.25 million. Per capita income in 1970-71 dropped by 22 per cent than that of 1972-73.

Based on the solid foundation established by Bangabandhu, Bangladesh is now on the highway of development and a role model for the least developed countries (LDCs) to revive from poverty and move towards prosperity. In the golden jubilee of independence, Bangladesh is moving forward to become an upper-middle economy in 2031 and a developed economy by 2041 as aspired by the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. An inclusive development policy has been adopted to realize this grand vision.
5. Bangabandhu’s Thoughts on Social Inclusion and Social Justice

The emergence of Bangladesh with the charismatic leadership of Bangabandhu in 1971 required to override the dissimilation of class, race, religion, gender and equality of opportunities to all citizens of Bangladesh. Bangabandhu had a dream of inclusive and emancipatory economic, social, political rights where all human beings would get the fundamental rights to live in his Sonar Bangla. He had a compendious philosophy to reconstruct the war-torn country. When the Awami Muslim League was established in 1949, he was the Joint Secretary of that party. Afterwards, in 1955, Awami League altered “Muslim” from its nomenclature. To imbed a secular political party, Bangabandhu played a vital role. As morning shows the day, youth leader Bangabandhu aptly stressed his commitment towards secularism, social justice, his largeness of spirit and towering humanism.

Meanwhile, he was a farsighted leader which can be seen while analyzing Six Points Movement in 1966. Those Six Points were Bengalis’ charter of freedom. He directly showed the political, social and economic deprivation in six points, which ultimately brought a milestone towards the sovereign state. Notwithstanding, he knew that most foreign earnings were coming from East Pakistan (i.e., Bangladesh), but Bengalis were not provided with their deserving jurisdiction. He oversaw the provincial Ministry of Industry in favour of thriving industrial advancement in East Pakistan. He bargained with the central government for an outstanding share of economic vantage to the entrepreneurs and people of Bangladesh. In his historic speech on 07 March 1971, he made a clarion call for independence and was vocal to ensure Bengali’s foothold.

Bangabandhu’s widespread planning became explicit after independence. The Constitution of Bangladesh was set down as the solemn expression of the people’s will. The structural foundation was driven by the practical experiences of the Bangalis, not from a mere scholarly backdrop. The reflection of this can be seen in the establishment of four central pillars, i.e., secularism, democracy, nationalism and socialism. Bangali’s struggle, absorption and awaiting dream of a prosperous and inclusive Bangladesh were the core of the creed. He was informed that in
the Pakistan regime, 22 families were controlling the whole economy. He did not want a similar scenario in Bangladesh, and this change was reflected in the FFYP.

Right after independence, Bangabandhu got a war-ravaged country whose poverty rate was nearly 80 per cent. The economy was not well-equipped to ensure fundamental rights. He focussed on social safety net programmes and thoughtful reconstructive planning, which are still relevant for the policymakers. He was well aware of social inclusion and emphatic about the ethnic minority.

He knew agriculture was the foundation of the country and emphasized policies to facilitate this sector. Along with the establishment of fertilizer factories across the country, he advanced irrigation processes and was strict about syndicates where farmers would get good crops. Some may criticize the nationalization process, but no eligible private sector was there to run these industries. Industrialization is required to generate employment for the growing population.

6. Way Forward: How to Realize Bangabandhu’s Dreams through Vision 2041

The brutal assassination of the architect of the nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, snatched away his dream to witness Sonar Bangla. To materialize the dream of Bangabandhu, “Vision 2041” has been adopted under the visionary leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. As per the Vision 2041 document, various targets have been set to reach the ultimate goal. One of the targets is to attain the status of an upper-middle income country by 2031 and the rate of high-income country by 2041. Moreover, the aim is to reduce the proportion of population living below the lower poverty line to less than 1 per cent and the proportion of population living under the upper poverty line to less than 3 per cent by 2041. Besides, the 20 years’ plan sets a target to achieve 9.9 per cent growth of GDP, ensuring investment to 46.88 per cent of the GDP by 2041 and increasing tax collection to 21.85 per cent of the GDP. The Second Perspective Plan (2021-2041) of Bangladesh consists of strategies, policies and programmes that will steer the process of turning the dream into reality.
The collaboration among multiple stakeholders is critical to active accelerated growth rate, poverty reduction and human development. According to the Vision 2041 document, there is no alternative to strengthening institutional capacities to visualize Bangabandhu's dream. To cope with the rapid transformational shifts in trade, education, healthcare, transportation and communication, the solid foundation of institutions is paramount. Yet, the critical challenge is to ensure the decentralization of power from the top to the grassroots level. The equitable distribution of growth is required to achieve inclusive development. Inclusive growth largely relies on the foundations of sustained macroeconomic stability. Increasing the rate of public expenditure in health and education, keeping the rate of inflation rate low to protect the people's basic needs, raising the tax to GDP ratio, etc. should be the priority areas for government to focus on sound macroeconomic management.

To Bangabandhu, people living in Bangladesh has always been regarded as his Sonar Manush (Golden Citizens) of his Sonar Bangla. Bangabandhu dreamt of building a nation free of poverty. However, hunger will not be realized if the requirements for human capital in the 21st century are not established. It is not just about poverty but also about improving living standards and wellbeing of the citizens (viz. with education, health and nutrition and job security). The focus should not only be given to increasing the enrolment rates. Instead, the concerning factors should be improving the quality of education, maternal and child nutrition and ensuring equal access to resources.

Moreover, the fourth industrial revolution is about to change the dynamics of the economy of Bangladesh. But the country still has a long way to go in terms of developing a skilled labour force, increasing digital competitiveness, investing in scientific and technology research, especially for driving innovations, linking higher education with economic growth, etc. Building "Digital Bangladesh" has to address the advancement in science and technology and ensure equitable distribution of resources. Otherwise, the formation of human capital will not be sustained.

As Bangladesh is blessed with marine resources and rich aquatic ecosystems, it is essential to unleash the blue economy's potential in a
sustainable manner. There is also a higher scope of marine tourism in Bangladesh like any other coastal countries in the world.51 Through appropriate policies and investments, the skilled workforce in the blue economy can achieve sustainable and inclusive economic growth. In addition, boosting the economy of Bangladesh, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) plays a critical role. In the initial years of independence, there was a dearth of FDI in the country that resulted in great misery. At present, under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) opened up enormous opportunities. The entire economy can steer up at an accelerated pace of growth. While the government is already trying to attract foreign and domestic investments in the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Industrial City, attracting more of them in the heavy industry, electrical and electronics, as well as high-tech sectors can form a more robust industrial foundation to the economy.

Regarding infrastructure development, there are several new mega-projects like Metro Rail and Padma Bridge, and other mega-investments like those in the energy sector. There are spill-over effects, such as the benefit for the poor and the marginalized population. On the other hand, there are risks of evictions and displacements of the poor because of the acquisition of the land. So, what could be the alternative options? Can the share of the infrastructure be given to the poor who are affected?

Bangabandhu has always visualized Bangladesh as a land full of potential, natural resources and archaeological sites. The thought of Bangabandhu can be realized through the tourism sector by developing the country as per the craft of the “Switzerland of the East”. While the scope of Vision 2041 is enormous, some other options can be bought under this Vision looking forward to manifold opportunities.52

Once ridiculed as a “bottomless basket”, Bangladesh has transformed itself into an “over-flowing bowl” through steady progress over the years. This rapid transformation has made it possible for the government to muster the courage of implementing Bangabandhu’s dreams through Vision 2041. All the tall claims regarding fulfilling the unfinished task of Bangabandhu by 2041 will be proven if and only if each human being of the country can get an equal share from the fruits of development.
7. Conclusion

As the greatest Bengali of all time, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s political agenda was to improve the lives of the poor people and ensure the well-being and security of the mass. Beginning from his FFYP focussing on poverty reduction and self-sufficiency in food production, he envisioned a prosperous, poverty and exploitation-free Bangladesh. Bangabandhu realized that the massive population of Bangladesh could be turned into assets. He transformed the GDP growth rate positively and created scopes for the industry and services sectors which had only a tiny percentage of investment. The FFYP, which was designed to build a sound institutional base in the development process, helped the policymakers long for future visions.

Bangladesh has come a long way since the departure of Bangabandhu. The nation’s life expectancy has dramatically risen since 1971. The Perspective Plan 2041 sets ambitious goals for human development. If the human development goals are achieved, Bangladesh will be well on its way to becoming an upper-middle-income economy by 2031 and eventually a high-income economy.

Bangabandhu nationalized primary education and all charitable dispensaries and opened some small credit programmes to materialize his visualized Bangladesh as a land of prosperity. Bangabandhu called the green revolution or the “second revolution” after the Liberation War to bring people out of the curse of poverty and hunger. The envisioned plan for 2021 and 2041 can turn the country into the “Switzerland of the East”, a prosperous Bangladesh with zero hunger, malnutrition and illiteracy. He always wanted to create jobs for the mass and prioritized agriculture and industrialization for the post-liberation Bangladesh. Bangabandhu’s solid dream to revive the Bangla as Sonar Bangla and the proverb “storehouse full of paddy, a pond full of fishes”, support his political schema and long for the story of happiness and the golden era of Bengal in the past.

Bangabandhu had to work unceasingly to rebuild the country to go beyond the status of “a bottomless basket”. His economic plans were also comprehensive enough to combat political, social, and economic deprivation as well as social injustice. Following the current plans, i.e., the Vision 2041 document, if the strategies regarding fostering human development are put into practice, Bangabandhu’s dream of building an equitable society will be materialized.
Notes

The author is grateful to Md. Nahiyan Shajid Khan and Md. Rafid Abrar Miah, Research Officers of BIJSS for their research assistance.


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