The Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) in collaboration with the German Embassy in Dhaka organised a Round Table on 'Development Policy on the Threshold of the Year 2000', during October 6-7, 1999 at the BIISS auditorium, Dhaka.

Mr. Tofail Ahmed, MP, Honourable Minister for Commerce and Industries, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, has been the Chief Guest in the Inaugural Session. Mr. Abul Hasan Chowdhury, MP, Honourable Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and Mr. M. Shamsul Islam, MP, Former Minister for Commerce, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh have been the Special Guests. The Opening Statements were made by Brigadier Shahedul Anam Khan, ndc, psc, Director General, BIISS and H. E. Mr. Uwe Schramm, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Bangladesh. In the Concluding Session, Advocate Abdul Matin Khasru, MP, Honourable Minister for
Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has been the Chief Guest.

About ten German experts and policy makers participated in the Round Table in addition to scholars, government officials, development practitioners, representatives from media, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and business community as well as other concerned professionals in Bangladesh. The Round Table, spread over two days, was divided into seven sessions including the Inaugural and Concluding Sessions. Nineteen papers were presented in the Round Table. The presentation of papers was followed by intense discussions and summing up by the moderators.

Mr. Mahbubul Alam, Editor, *The Independent*, and Mr. Guenter Knabe, Head of Asia Programme, Deutche Welle have served the Round Table as its co-moderators except the Inaugural and Concluding Sessions. They have also undertaken the responsibility of writing the Summary of the Proceedings. In their efforts, they have been assisted by Mr. Abdul Mannan and A. B. M. Ziaur Rahman, Research Associates, BIISS.

The Inaugural Session was devoted to Bangladesh's development strategy and the role of external assistance with particular reference to German development co-operation. The First Session dealt with the globalisation and development policy while the Second Session analysed the experiences of development partnership between Bangladesh and Germany. The Third Session was devoted to the study of poverty
alleviation, human rights and development policy. The Fourth Session discussed the role of NGOs in the development policy of Bangladesh. The Fifth Session dealt with the new ideas and approaches for development policy keeping in mind the partnership agenda for 2000 and beyond. Finally, the Concluding Session was devoted to the political, social and economic development in Bangladesh with a focus on the national dream of *Sonar Bangla* (Golden Bengal).

Commerce Minister Mr. Tofail Ahmed in his Inaugural Speech stressed on strengthening parliamentary democracy for development. He said that development policy should be formulated on the basis of consensus. The Commerce Minister emphasised on the importance of taking the advantages offered by the globalisation, particularly the contemporary international economic relations. He also added that it would be difficult for the least developed countries (LDCs) to sustain unless they have duty-free access to the markets of the developed countries. In this regard, he sought assistance from the development partners of Bangladesh. The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr. M. Abul Hasan Chowdhury, in his Address as a Special Guest, termed development as a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional task. He said that economic development could not be achieved in isolation. In his speech, he put special emphasis on the need of the country for close co-operation with its development partners for the resolution of the ensuing tasks of socio-economic development. Former Commerce Minister Mr. Shamsul Islam MP, in his Address as a Special Guest, stressed the need for proper development policy for a sound economy. He said that the rise of GDP
without the improvement of living standard of the common people was bound to result in the failure of development policies.

Brigadier Shahedul Anam Khan, Director General of BISS, in his Opening Address said that Global challenges can be met by global partnership. He stressed that it is in this context that German-Bangladesh co-operation is very important. The German Ambassador, H. E. Mr. Uwe Schramm, in his Opening Address said that co-operation with the developing countries is one of the corner stones of German foreign policy. He stressed that development policy should be aimed at maintaining peace and stability, which can be supplemented by the promotion of democracy and non-violent means of conflict resolution. Major General Mustafa Kamaluddin, Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS, who presided over the Inaugural Session, in his Address, explained the multi-dimensional aspects of development. He said that foreign trade and foreign investment are of crucial importance for the development of the country.

In the first key-note presentation, Dr. Wolfgang-Peter Zingel of the South Asian Institute of Heidelberg University, Germany referring to government sources stated that German development co-operation has four goals: the democratisation of legal society (*Rechtsstaat*), to find a way out of the debt trap, to link globalisation with ecological modernisation and inter-cultural understanding. Dr. Citha D. Maass of the Research Institute for International Policy and Security was of the view that development co-operation is necessary for global
security. Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmed, Chairman of the Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, stressed on harmonising the elements of development, i.e., peace, equity, good governance and sustainability. He said that the dogma of economic reformation should be substituted by a realistic approach.

On the first day of the deliberation, diverse ideas came through the paper presenters as well as through the participants. It was said that the nature and extent of future development assistance to Bangladesh as well as to other developing countries from their development partners would be increasingly conditioned by their political relations as part of a new globalised approach to development. It was observed that in terms of profit and job opportunities, the blessings of globalisation are unequally distributed. Globalisation was viewed significantly in economic terms. There was an opinion that national governments are losing power, because the rules of game are determined mainly by private companies or multilateral financial institutions.

However, this view was opposed by some others who argued that if the national governments in the developed countries allow the private companies to employ workers from the developing countries or from the LDCs, the private companies would not hesitate to seize the opportunity of cheap labour. It was opined that developing countries, particularly the LDCs might be isolated if they do not take adequate preparation to face the challenges of globalisation. Considerable emphasis was put on good governance with a view to facing the challenges of globalisation. It was also
stressed that in ensuring good governance, the role of civil society is very important.

Globalisation was considered a mixed blessing, as not all the states were to benefit from it equally or at all. Caution was expressed by some participants that for the least developed countries (LDCs) like Bangladesh it would be highly difficult to prosper in the environment of globalisation. At the same time, it was understood that the process of globalisation is irreversible. Therefore, discussions centred on how to leave with or take the advantage of globalisation. With regard to Bangladesh’s predicaments, a host of suggestions were discussed. First of all, it was argued that the country should prepare itself to face the challenges of globalisation. Secondly, as an LDC Bangladesh also should bargain preferential access to the markets of the developed countries. Some participants also said that the free movement of goods, services and capital also should be accompanied by the free movement of labour.

The Round Table put particular emphasis on the need for education reform. It was suggested that education should be oriented more towards technical education and vocational training. The central objective of education should be to transform the huge population of Bangladesh into developed human resources capable of facing the professional challenges of the twenty-first century. While discussing the development of physical infrastructure, private sector participation in the field was recommended by the participants.

Discussions also centred on the increases of GDP growth and the competitiveness of the economy. It was opined that
most problems in Bangladesh come from poverty. Growth is necessary for poverty alleviation. Poverty alleviation can be meaningful when poor people are brought to the mainstream of economic activities. In the growing process of globalisation, Bangladesh’s survival and, more so, prosperity would depend on how far the country would be able to increase its competitiveness vis-à-vis the outside world.

German development co-operation with Bangladesh – technical and financial assistance, trade and investment – was discussed quite elaborately. In this regard, past experiences were analysed and prospects for the future were evaluated. In this regard, debate centred on how far the development assistance from the developed countries to the developing countries is motivated by the enlightened self-interest of the former and how far it is motivated by their parochial self-interest. German assistance to Bangladesh was also viewed in this light. In course of discussions, the German side emphasised that German development assistance is designed to facilitate the process of socio-economic and politico-cultural development of Bangladesh through democratisation, economic liberalisation, maintenance of peace and stability, eradication of social conflicts along vertical as well as horizontal lines. Germany remains one of the most important trade partners of Bangladesh, particularly an important destination of Bangladeshi export. However, the amount of German investment in Bangladesh still remains a meagre one. In the course of deliberations, considerable efforts were concentrated on exploring the ways and means of improving the effectiveness of German development co-operation, and
increasing bilateral trade volume and German investment in Bangladesh.

On the second day of the Round Table, the paper presenters and the discussants came out with various observations and suggestions. It was observed that absolute poverty is the main hindrance to development, and a comprehensive approach to development through women empowerment and the growth of awareness was suggested. Departing from conventional methods, a comprehensive qualitative indicator for the measurement of poverty was suggested. The hindrances on the path of poverty alleviation, it was observed, were the lack of a programme for a frontal attack over poverty and the lack of collaboration among the parties to it. To eradicate poverty, suggestions such as strengthening government representation at the grassroot level, tagging the environmental protection issue along with poverty alleviation, formulation of laws to ensure poverty alleviation, efforts through local body, establishment of land mortgage banks and an increase in the education budget of the country were suggested. As the improvement of human rights situation requires a strict monitoring of the government activities, a vibrant and active civil society was suggested to achieve that goal. Proposals were made to speed up privatisation process.

Candid discussions were held on the role of NGOs in development policy. Emphasis was given on partnership between GO and NGO, development of GO-NGO relationship and inclusion of scientists, engineers and technocrats in the programmes of the NGOs. It was observed that NGOs are relatively free from bureaucratic complexities, and they are
flexible and innovative in their approaches. Acceptability of NGOs to the government has also increased due to donors' intervention. Emphasis was also put on the initiatives to raise awareness and enhance the representation of issues important to the poor. It was observed that development is a political process. In this regard, there was a call to both the government and opposition parties for giving attention to basic needs of the general mass.

Some participants also criticised the NGOs accusing them for pursuing commercial objective by imposing higher interest rates in getting their return. It was viewed that although NGOs are free from bureaucratic complexities, they will also fall into the trap of bureaucracy with their growing institutional expansion. There was opinion that NGOs can not be alternative to GO. Keeping in mind this factor, they called to determine the role of NGOs. In this regard, there was also call for ensuring the accountability and transparency of the NGOs. Suggestion was also forwarded envisaging closer interaction between the local government and the NGOs.

The view of the German government on German development assistance policy was also shared. The constraints on the way of making German co-operation effective in the SMEs and some suggestions to overcome them came under discussion. Germany was closely monitoring CHT Peace Accord and was providing funds for the proper implementation of the Accord. As the flow of financial aid would be restricted in the upcoming years, the necessity of the best use of resources and identifying the priority sectors for development was emphasised. Suggestions were also made to concentrate the activities in specialised sectors, for the
renewal of the instruments and procedures of development agencies and adaptation of programme instead of project orientation approach. Bangladesh is experiencing a gap between agricultural demand and supply and the donors are also withdrawing from that sector. It was observed that with the extinction of the SMEs in the age of globalisation rural people are moving to the urban areas in large numbers. German assistance to Bangladesh concentrated in the field of training, possibility study and so on was noted to be insufficient for creating entrepreneurs.

In the concluding session, papers were presented by Dr. Wolfgang-Peter Zingel, South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University, and Mr. A.K.M. Abdus Sabur, Senior Research Fellow, Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies. Dr. Zingel explained the prospect of Bangladesh from the perspective of globalisation, localisation and regionalisation. Mr. Sabur, in his presentation, evaluated the dream of “Sonar Bangla” with some reflections on both the myths and the reality, while concentrating on a vision for the future. Participants emphasised on the need for national consensus on major issues.

Addressing the Concluding Session as the Chief Guest, Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Advocate Abdul Matin Khasru, MP, emphasised on the rule of law, managerial skills, technology transfer, proper organisational set-up for development as well as for poverty alleviation. He said that rule of law and the principles of accountability and transparency should be equally applicable to all as they form
the basis of democracy. He also stressed the need for strengthening local government.

The Concluding Session was co-chaired by Brigadier Shahedul Anam Khan, Director General of BIJSS, and H. E. Mr. Uwe Schramm, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany. Mr. Mahbubul Alam, and Mr. Guenter Knabe, as the joint moderators of the Round Table, presented the summary of the proceedings at the Concluding Session. Both the Chairs thanked the Chief and Special Guests, distinguished speakers and the participants for their contributions to the Round Table. In his speech, Ambassador Uwe Schramm hoped that the development policies would be much more political in nature and purpose, which would increasingly play an important role in the prevention, control and settlements of conflicts. Brigadier Shahedul Anam Khan hoped that knowledge gathered through academic and professional interaction, like the Round Table, would be of significant contribution to the formulation of development policies and the management of development partnership.

Mahbubul Alam and Guenter Knabe