Bangladesh Development Initiative (BDI) – Center for South Asia Studies (CSAS)
2013 International Conference on Bangladesh
February 22-24, 2013

Press Release – February 27, 2013

A unique international conference on Bangladesh just concluded at the University of California Berkeley campus in USA. The conference was organized by the Bangladesh Development Initiative (BDI), a US based non-political research think tank and advocacy group of Bangladeshi professionals based in the United States. The Center for South Asia Studies (CSAS), one of world's leading research organizations on South Asia studies, co-hosted the conference with BDI and provided important logistical support.

The overall theme of the conference was "Bridging the Policy-Action Divide in Bangladesh: Challenges and Prospects for Bangladesh’s Future." Nearly 20 academic sessions with 50 papers were organized covering a broad spectrum of challenges faced by Bangladesh economy and society; to emphasize the policy and real world aspects of these challenges, nine panels and plenary sessions were organized on subjects as diverse as, Economic Growth through Inclusive Development, Mitigating Corruption, Gender Issues, Environment and Urbanization issues, Environmental Justice, Role of Diaspora, Conversations with Silicon Valley Bangladeshi Entrepreneurs, Capital Goods Industry, and others. These panel sessions were designed to elicit maximum debate and conversations between the audience and the experts on the panel.

The three day conference featured a number of keynote speakers and other distinguished guests. Professor Rehman Sobhan spoke on the political economy of development and the injustice of poverty, Professor David Lewis who is author of a recent book on Bangladesh spoke on the role of the NGOs and the Civil Society, Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam spoke on the role of media in enhancing democracy and development, Advocate Rizwana Hasan, recent recipient of the Magsaysay Award, spoke on her work in seeking Environmental Justice in Bangladesh.

Other dignitaries who attended and participated include Dan Mozena, US Ambassador to Bangladesh, Akramul Qader, Bangladesh ambassador to US, Professor Lawrence Cohen,
Director CSAC, and Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost UC Berkeley campus, Professor George Breslauer.

On Saturday evening, before the banquet, the recognition and award part of the program featured the first ever BDI Lifetime Achievement Award given to Professor Rehman Sobhan followed by his lecture on the "Injustice of Poverty." UC Berkeley Professor and eminent development economist, Pranab Bardhan joined BDI President Munir Quddus to introduce Professor Sobhan. Following the award, Professor Sobhan delivered a riveting lecture tracing the history of development efforts in Bangladesh over the last 50 years. He spoke of his early work with colleagues that led to the “two economy theory” which provided the theory behind the political demands eventually leading to the struggle for justice and the creation of Bangladesh.

In introducing Professor Sobhan, Dean Quddus read messages from Professor Amartya Sen, Nobel Laureate in economics (1998) and Professor Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Laureate in Peace (2006).

The conference was made possible because of generous financial support from a number of organizations, both public and private businesses. This enabled logistics and travel support for keynote speakers and authors who travelled from Bangladesh and other locations. Among the sponsors who gave generous financial support are: the MGH Group, The Asia Foundation, US State Department and Embassy in Bangladesh, Southeast Bank, Mutual Trust Bank, and the Bay Area Bangladeshi community. Prof Saad Andaleeb played a crucial role in procuring these financial contributions. Mrs. Leena Badruzzaman played a critical part in getting financial support from the Bay Area Bangladeshi community.

Long time BDI members, Professor Saad Andaleeb and Ashraf Ali were also recognized for their many contributions to the organization. Earlier in the day BDI and AEDSB (Association for Economic and Development Studies on Bangladesh) jointly recognized Professor Salim Rashid for his contributions to the discipline of economics and to Bangladesh.

Dr. Sukomal Modak was the main force lining up the Bay Area Bangladeshi community for volunteers to arrange the cultural program, host families, rides from the airport, program booklet, and the registration desk. He presented a welcome on behalf of the Bay Area Bangladeshi community at the Saturday formal opening program. Prof Rahim Quazi who chaired the track on trade and investments summarized the findings of papers presented in his track and those presented in the economics track during the closing program. Prof Farida Khan chaired the opening session and the session on gender and development, and participated in the capital goods industries panel. Dr. Ashraf Ali introduced the BDI as an organization and the conference organizing committee in the Friday welcome reception; he also organized the Capital Goods industry panel and as the BDI treasurer, he was the point person in charge of all facility payments and travel stipends for the participants. Prof Saad Andaleeb moderated or co-moderated a number of sessions and panels including those in the education and health track, the lunch plenary, and the corruption panel. He also formally recognized the donors who financially and otherwise supported the conference, and chaired the closing program. Prof Ahrar Ahmed chaired a number

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of sessions, presented two awards at the Saturday banquet and summarized papers presented in the governance track during the closing ceremony. Dr. M Faizul Islam worked successfully to invite media to cover the conference, including Thikana and Voice of America (Bangla). Prof Akhlaque Haque co-moderated the corruption panel and summarized the panel discussions at the closing session. Prof Adnan Morshed organized the Environment and Urbanization track and a few panels including the plenary on environmental justice. He also co-moderated the Town Hall meeting on Shabagh. Dr. Ahmad Badruzzaman organized two panels using the strategic location of the conference - one on the role of the diaspora and the other with Silicon Valley high-tech entrepreneurs interested in investing in Bangladesh. He was instrumental in getting the word out in the local community. Prof Munir Quddus moderated the panel on Growth with Inclusive Development and the session on the contributions of Salim Rashid to economics and to Bangladesh. As President he offered remarks at the welcome reception, the formal opening and the closing events.

On Sunday morning, a town hall type session on the Shahbagh protests taking place in Dhaka was organized with Mr. Mahfuz Anam and Ms. Rizwana Hasan leading the conversation. Participants who have actually participated in the protests and student bloggers at UC Berkeley brought their perspectives to the conversation.

The conference ended on a positive note with a call to the participants - policy makers, businesses, civil society and NGO community - to work together in the interest of the country and to redouble their efforts to attain much higher growth with equity so that eliminating poverty is the major focus of development, not an afterthought. All agreed that the political gridlock the nation has faced is a huge barrier and must be overcome. There is not much time to lose since the race is on and unless Bangladesh is able to achieve political stability soon, investors may bypass the nation for other less attractive locations.

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