

VISION 2041: BANGLADESH PERSPECTIVE

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“A plan is not merely a technical and an economical document but also a socio-political document. It must be able to enthuse, mobilize and motivate people. It must provide a vision and perspective for the nation.”

The First Five Year Plan (1973-1978) of Bangladesh

Introduction

A nation without vision is a nation gone astray. Such is not the case for Bangladesh whose independence in 1971 was the culmination of a people's struggle, as much for political freedom as it was for their economic emancipation. In keeping with those aspirations, the Government's Vision 2041 is an articulation of where this nation needs to be in 2041. Bangladesh is on the brink to become a developed nation by 2041. On February 5, 2014, the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, declared in the national parliament that her government would revise its Vision 2021 as Vision 2041 by updating a number of targets so that by the year 2041 Bangladesh can become a “prosperous and developed place after crossing the status of a middle income country” (Financial Express, 6 February, 2014). Bangladesh's progress is a mosaic of solid achievements with some disappointments. Over the past 40 years since independence, Bangladesh has increased its real per capita income by more than 130 percent, cut poverty by more than half, and is well set to achieve most of the millennium development goals. The economy today is a lot more flexible and resilient, as indicated by the ability to withstand the global financial crisis with minimum adverse effects. Bangladesh is now much more capable of handling natural disasters with minimum loss of lives. This remarkable progress was achieved despite numerous internal and external constraints.

Vision 2041 may not be achievable mainly because of a lack of highly skilled workforce, and the less than satisfactory state of our education and human resources. Of course, achieving the lower middle income country status is not a leap forward, but indeed a glimmer of hope for a country whose political history over the past four decades is characterized by a volatile political environment. Frequently this manmade disaster along with natural calamities draws the attention of world's media. The occasional exception to this pattern of media coverage is when the country is referred to in the context of conflicts in the

other part of the world, as corollary to the role of the United Nations in bringing peace (Riaz, 2016). In order to become a developed country, Bangladesh needs to attain a relatively high level of economic growth and a consistently top of the line performance in HDIs from now on until 2041. Also to ensure professionalism and responsiveness in civil service by freeing the civil servants from undue interference and influence. The study has holistically analysed the challenges, prevailing global indicators, projected trends, and impediments faced by Bangladesh's to arrive at a possible methodology to guide Bangladesh to achieve Vision 2041. Bangladesh needs to first link 'Perspective Plan 2021' through which Bangladesh aspires to become Middle Income Country. This Perspective Plan 2021 may need some modifications, considering targets and indicators of (SDGs) 2030 as well as basing on the objectives and road map for Vision 2041. (NDC Seminar, 13 October, 2016).

Background Perspective of MDGs, SDGs and Vision 2021

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

MDGs were the eight international development goals for the year 2015 that had been established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, following the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. All 189 United Nations member states at that time, and at least 22 international organizations, committed to help achieve the following Millennium Development Goals by 2015:

- To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
- To achieve universal primary education.
- To promote gender equality and empower women.
- To reduce child mortality.
- To improve maternal health.
- To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.
- To ensure environmental sustainability.
- To develop a global partnership for development.

Implementation of Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs)

SDGs are universal set of goals, targets and indicators that UN member states are expected to use to frame their agendas and political policies in the 15-year period up to 2030. SDG 2030 Agenda, that follows the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of 2000-2015, is a plan of action for people, planet, prosperity and peace that includes of 17 SDGs, 169 targets and associated indicators are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. SDG 2030 came into effect on 01 January 2016 and is in force for the next 15 years.

Vision 2021 and Bangladesh

Bangladesh came into being following more than two decades of political struggle culminating in the war of independence in 1971. This struggle was inspired by a vision for a democratic, non-communal, prosperous, and equitable society, where the common citizens of the country live in prosperity and have equitable access to quality education, health care, rule of law and employment opportunities. Present Government of Bangladesh resurrected that dream in their election manifesto “Charter of Change” in 2008 with the proclamation of Vision 2021 to drive the country’s sustainable development agenda by striking the right balance between equitable national economic progress and human development. After 15 years of parliamentary democracy, it is reasonable to take stock of the country’s achievements so far, and more importantly, of what the country should accomplish in the next 15 years, which will take us to the 50th anniversary of our independence (Vision 2021, 2006).

Blending of Vision 2021 and SDGs

Based on its MDG experience, the Government aligned the goals of SDGs with the priority areas of the 7th FYP to a large extent. Out of 169 SDG targets, 56 targets are well aligned and 103 are identified as partially aligned. The 7th FYP has a target 7.4% GDP growth rate, which is well above the 7% recommendation under SDGs for LDCs. Thus, the 7th FYP will lay the foundation for implementing SDGs by 2030 in Bangladesh. For the 1st time in the history of formulation of national plan of Bangladesh, a Development Result Framework (DRF), considering the indicators of SDGs, has been incorporated in the 7th FYP. The process will get refined over time and obviously continue into the 8th

and 9th FYPs. The end of the 9th FYP incidentally coincides with the end of SDG programme.

Realization of Vision 2041

Vision 2041 vis a vis a Developed Country

According to the United Nations Statistics Division, there is no established convention for the designation of “developed” and “developing” countries or areas in the United Nations system. And it notes that the designations “developed” and “developing” are intended for statistical convenience and do not necessarily express a judgment about the stage reached by a particular country or area in the development process. Most commonly, the criteria for evaluating the degree of economic development are gross domestic product (GDP), Gross National Product (GNP), the per capita income, level of industrialization, amount of widespread infrastructure and general standard of living. Which criteria are to be used and which countries can be classified as being developed are subjects of debate.

Economic criteria have tended to dominate discussions. One such criterion is income per capita; countries with high GDP per capita would thus be described as developed countries. Another economic criterion is industrialization; countries in which the tertiary and quaternary sectors of industry dominate would thus be described as developed. More recently another measure, the Human Development Index (HDI), which combines an economic measure, national income, with other measures, indices for life expectancy and education has become prominent. This criterion would define developed countries as those with a very HDI rating (NDC Seminar, 2016).

Option for Bangladesh for Achieving Developed Country Status

Lower-Middle Income (LMIC) Status was achieved when per capita income reached \$1,080 in 2015. If fast and shared economic growth continues, Bangladesh can hope to step up the ‘development ladder’ further, including graduating from International Development Aid (IDA), the Asian Development Fund (ADA) and Least Developed Country (LDA) status. Bangladesh will need to maintain its economic momentum as it slowly loses the benefits it gains from its LMIC and LDC status. Experience of other countries suggests that the next step up will be tough. In a recent study (Felipe, Kumar and Galope, 2014), 17 of the Asian Development Bank found that it takes the average lower middle

income country over half a century to reach upper-middle income status. The average country moves from upper-middle to high income in just 15 years. But these averages disguise two groups of countries: fast-growers, and slow-growers. Bangladesh will need to keep working hard to make sure it is in the first group. As Bangladesh succeeds, its access to external resources to finance development and the other benefits it receives – notably preferential market access – may come under pressure. While this may not be an immediate risk, it matters.

While graduation from IDA, ADF and LDC status will reflect an improved quality of life for Bangladeshis, this growth will come with challenges. In particular, Bangladesh will need to come to terms with slowly reduced development aid, or aid with hardened conditions. Graduation from IDA, ADF and LDC status will cause Bangladesh to lose the following benefits:

- Benefits from Asian Development Fund (about \$2.78 billion over 3 years)
- Benefits from International Development Assistance (about \$3.9 billion over 3 years)
- Benefits from Least Developed Country status:
 - Access to concessional foreign assistance
 - Preferential market access
 - Priority access to technical assistance for capacity building
 - Flexibility in the implementation of different international agreements
 - Reduced financial obligations

Despite the challenges ahead, Bangladesh should continue to chart its development course. Bangladesh graduated from low-income to lower-middle income 40 years after becoming an LDC. This graduation was the first step of a long ladder out of least developed country status. In the next 12 years Bangladesh has the potential to graduate from the group of countries receiving IDA, the group of countries receiving assistance from ADF and LDC status, and on to even higher status. While exiting from low-income status means that Bangladesh passed the GNI per capita threshold of \$1,046 set by the World Bank on 1st July 2015, graduating from IDA, ADF and LDC status will require sustaining, and even surpassing, this performance across a broader set of targets. However, the road to developed country status may be long as it has to pass through various steps to become developed country by 2041 are as follows:

Table 1: Steps to reach the status of Developed country			
S/N	Status	GNI per Capita (US\$)	Remarks
1.	Low Income LDC	Below US\$ 1046	
2.	Lower Middle Income LDC	1046 to 4136	Bangladesh became LMIC in 2015
3.	Lower Middle Income non LDC	Graduation from LDC as GNI per capita becomes 1242 US\$	Needs graduation from IDA & ADF as well at 1215 \$
4.	Upper Middle Income non LDC	4136 to 12,745	Normally takes 40 to 50 years
5.	Higher Income Country (Developed Country)	Above 12,745	Likely to take 15 years

Indicators for Realization of Vision 2041

Achievements during the past quarter century have been significant. To recapitulate the major ones: the growth rate has accelerated to the half-decade average of over 6 percent, the demographic transition has continued and reduced the fertility rate approximately to the replacement level, the dependence of external capital inflow has dramatically declined, significant structural change has occurred with a reduction in agriculture's share of output and employment and, agricultural productivity has nevertheless grown resulting in much improved availability of food per person and major improvements in indicators of physical wellbeing—including dramatic reduction in infant and child mortality and rapid increase in life expectancy have taken place. These are very significant achievements that do not just happen. (Khan, 2015)

Human Resource Development: Need for Education Sector Reform for Realizing Vision 2041

Human Resource Development

In order to become a developed country, Bangladesh needs to attain a relatively high level of economic growth and a consistently top of the line performance

in HDIs from now on until 2041. A developed country means a post industrial economy where the service sector generates more wealth than the industrial sector. It must therefore have very high achievements in education, health care, food security, social safety, science and technology and environmental protection. The common criteria for measuring a country's development are both economic and non-economic: GDP or per capita income alone doesn't ensure a developed economy status. Rather, along with a preferably double digit growth and a high standard of living, a developed economy has to ensure that human development continues an upward curve. HDI quantifies a country's growth in different non-economic fields into a single figure. Broadly speaking, the vision of Human resource development includes:

- Developing individuals as empowered citizens and assets who can think outside the box.
- Developing and utilizing the capacities of individuals for performing at the highest level.
- Turning an individual into a proactive thinker and a person of action.
- Empowering individuals and groups to explore alternatives and not to limit themselves to one set of solutions only.
- Optimizing efficiency and effectiveness of action.

Need for Reform: Educational Sector

When we talk about reform, we assume that there are issue that impede an existing system's progress and the expected delivery of goods; that the system is either stagnant, outmoded or out of touch with the changing world. Our education sector is under a tremendous pressure as needs increase exponentially while delivery fails to come up with expectations. While many developed countries deal with student populations in hundreds and thousands, we deal with millions. Demographics and population statistics, coupled with insufficient resources and inefficient delivery mechanisms are formidable challenges to our education sector in its effort to provide quality education. In its current state, our education sector cannot ensure the level of HRD that we require in order transiting from a lower middle income country to a developed country by 2041. As the country begins its journey to 'destination 2041', it has to successfully meet a number of daunting challenges and issues that face it now and will do so for quite some time to come. We have to reap the benefit of demographic dividend, ensure that the fruits of

development reach even the most marginalized segments of our population, meet the demands of liberalization and democracy, address environmental issues and ensure participation of ethnic and minority groups. Above all, our education sector should be ready to provide the best impetus and creative energy to HRD policies and programs in years to come.

Education to be an ambient and effective force shaping both HRD models and outcomes has to be of a high quality. It has to address the larger issues of excellence in teaching, learning and research, access and equity, automation and technology, ethics and values and a host of other imperatives, besides developing the highest level of competencies among learners and researchers in different subjects, fields and disciplines. Fortunately for us, we have an education policy (NEP) adopted in 2010, that outlines a vision as well as spells out objectives that can guide us towards the future. This will not be possible unless sweeping reforms are made in the education sector. The reforms should proceed from a vision and a mission, with specific objectives driving them along the way. The reforms should briefly include the following areas and concerns:

- A political will—which doubles as a national will-- to bring about a paradigm shift in the way we value our education and the way it is conceived, planned and delivered.
- Giving it the highest priority and a substantial increase in budgetary allocation to education (up to 6% of GDP in phases, or 25% of the annual budget). It will also require resource mobilization from all available channels.
- Our primary schools should be turned into centers of excellence. If we can achieve that goal, secondary, post-secondary, tertiary and higher education will each benefit from the success of the preceding phase/phases. Progress in each of these phases will be seeded in the phase immediately preceding it.

Foreign Policy of Bangladesh for Realization of Vision 2041

The potential strengths of Bangladesh need to be meticulously harnessed to achieve status of a developed nation. The foreign policy perspectives need to be revolutionized through creativity for the ‘roadmap’ to be realized to achieve Vision 2041. The people of Bangladesh have demonstrated resolute steadfastness in the past 45 years to overcome the status of ‘Bottomless Basket’. It is now aspiring to be a ‘Middle Income Country’ by 2021. Bangladesh has to develop its foreign policy through multi-lateral approach in view of contemporary world

scenario and implement the action-plans to achieve Vision 2041. In the era of globalization, Bangladesh, like other developing countries, is confronted with threats emanating from both external and internal sources: terrorism, drug and human trafficking, poverty, political instability, climate change, etc. Having stated this, let us focus on some geo-strategic realities of Bangladesh.

Realities of Bangladesh in the Geo-strategic Context

- Bangladesh is located in South Asia, a war-torn region since 1947. Bangladesh is placed in between two rising Asian giants India and China. (Rashid, 2008).
- India and China have uneasy political relationship as they face contested borders. The unsettled boundary often erupts as an irritation to their bilateral relations.
- India and Pakistan have rivalry and the Kashmir dispute has exacerbated the bitterness of their relations.
- Shared security perception is the glue that binds regional countries, such as ASEAN or the European Union. In South Asia, there exists no shared or common perception of security among the countries. Some states even perceive security threat arising from within the region.
- South Asian region is asymmetrical because India's physical size is more than the combined size of all countries in the region.

Challenges of Foreign Policy

To begin with, the challenges include Bangladesh's unique geographical location, her modest natural resources which increase a dependence on imports; a relatively smaller economic base posing numerous developmental challenges; the rise of global and local terrorism; climate change that Bangladesh is especially vulnerable to and, finally, the increasing exposure to global economic swings that has pushed many countries into further economic gloom in the past. Considering the geo-strategic realities of South Asian region, the challenge is how to maintain a delicate balance of relations between China and India. Another diplomatic challenge is inter-connectivity and how to take advantage of the geo-political situation of Bangladesh, regionally and globally. Transit and transshipment within the region ought to be considered for gaining benefits. Accordingly, there is a strong view that an integrated multimodal transport operation is imperative

within the region. (Rashid, 2008). Degradation of environment and climate change poses security risk for Bangladesh because there is an interdependent relationship between internal security and economy. (Rizvi, 2015). Food and Energy-security is another challenge for meeting the developmental needs of Bangladesh. Bangladesh's geography imposes certain visible limitations on our external interface and transactions. Another challenge is how to manage, develop and utilize the water resources of the region for the benefit of people. (Moni, 2011). Our modest natural resources enhance import dependence and most of foreign exchange reserves are spent on the import of essentials. Market access to our RMG and other export oriented products are facing challenges because of extreme competition. (Rizvi, 2015). Bangladesh with an area of 1, 47,570 square kilometers and an estimated population of 160 million is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. In the last decade, terrorism and violent extremism have emerged as critical security challenges across the globe. Whilst terrorism has existed for centuries, it is in the first decade of the 21st century that it has emerged as a national security challenge for most countries of the world. As a derivative of 9/11, Bangladesh has also had its share of terrorist attacks, although historically, the people of Bangladesh are extremely peace-loving (Moni, 2011).

Policy Options for Bangladesh

The main objectives of Bangladesh's foreign policy, is to uphold its sovereignty, cultural identity and ideology. At the same time, while these factors do pose threats, it is difficult to determine exactly when and how they will evolve into threats to national security. The most pressing task before Bangladesh is to achieve political stability; otherwise, it will not be possible for its diplomats to project a positive image of the country. As long as Bangladesh is domestically not in order, it would not be realistic to expect it to have a credible and effective foreign policy. Our location is a challenge. But again, it is this location that is an advantage in that we are a "bridge" between South Asia and South East Asia - the two fastest growing regions of the world. Our Foreign Policy recognizes this and one of our priorities has been to make concerted efforts to act as this bridge between the two regions to gather benefits for every state and people in this expanded region through physical connectivity as much as a connectivity of ideas (Rashid, 2008).

In view of the foregoing discussion on challenges and global dynamics to Bangladesh foreign policy, we have the following recommended policy options as way forward:

- The priority of Bangladesh foreign policy should look for market access to Europe, Middle East and North American countries of her goods and products. Given the fact that there is an unfair international system of trade which is heavily tilted against the least developed countries, another major issue for us is duty and quota free market access for our products.
- The next priority of our foreign relations should be to find destinations for our huge surplus manpower, to explore better terms of employment and to ensure their safety, rights and welfare of expatriates in foreign countries.
- Sensitizing the world about the serious challenges faced by countries that are most vulnerable to climate change, such as Bangladesh, and to work collectively towards developing mechanisms for adaptation as well as mitigation should be the third priority. Bangladesh need to be more vocal to get due compensation from the developed countries on climate change issues.
- Bangladesh should focus for regional and extra regional connectivity especially to India, Myanmar, Nepal and China to facilitate trade and commerce. Connectivity, Transit and transshipment within the region ought to be considered for gaining benefits in consonant with national interest.
- Our engagement in UN peace keeping operations provides effective leverage for us in the constantly expanding agenda of challenges and opportunities. Bangladesh should pronounce its participation in UN peace keeping mission as the highest troops contributing country and try to take lead in global initiative in peace and explore the opportunities in trade and commerce.
- Bangladesh should continue to support its anti-terrorism posture and should be prepared to deal with this challenge internally and externally in partnership with other members of the regional and international community.
- Bangladesh should facilitate frequent and regular high level visits as well as people-to-people contacts between the regional countries, especially India, Myanmar and China to be facilitated by enhanced regional connectivity, will add to the depth of our mutual understanding and cooperation.

Recommendations

Following are the Recommendations:

- Vision 2041 should be articulated as soon as possible like Vision 2021 so that all stakeholders are clear about the concept.
- The Government should focus on the human resources development in conformation with education policy keeping the Vision 2041 in mind. A separate Ministry to be created to focus on skill development and human resource management.
- In order to realize the of Vision 2041 necessary policy options to be ascertained, prioritized and implemented in phases.

Conclusion

Government's Vision 2021 to become a middle income country has been extended to Vision 2041, which is an ambition of where this nation needs to be in 2041. By implementing the Vision-2041, Bangladesh will be a peaceful, prosperous, happy and developed nation comparable with the developed world. Bangladesh is now ready to assume its rightful place in the Asian century, and lead the way by example for resource constrained, geographically vulnerable and climatically challenged least developed countries around the world towards sustainable Development and long term prosperity. Inspired by Bangabandhu's vision for a "Sonar Bangla" –a Golden Bengal –Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has laid out a blueprint for a developed and prosperous Bangladesh by 2041. We would need the international community on our side to realize that Vision in an increasingly globalized world. The Government and people of Bangladesh have proven that we can deliver tangible results and performance in our economic, social and development paradigms–impressive by any standard in a comparable milieu –drawing on meaningful cooperation from our international partners.

In its current state, our education sector cannot ensure the level of HRD that we require in order transiting from a lower middle income country to a developed country by 2041. In the context of Bangladesh, the dominance of national interest in the formulation of foreign policy is especially prevalent. Traditionally, the main objectives of foreign policy of Bangladesh have been self preservation, maintenance of territorial integrity, economic advancement and augmentation of national power. The emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state in 1971 in South Asia appears to be a unique phenomenon in international affairs. It

is apparent that the conduct of foreign policy of Bangladesh appears to be a delicate balancing act between preservation of sovereignty and pressures from external powers. The foreign policy of Bangladesh, like that of any state is also primarily a projection of the country's socio-economic and political compulsions in international politics. The foreign policy of Bangladesh should invariably take into account the changing realities, both in the domestic and international scenes. The main purpose of Bangladesh's Foreign Policy is the reinforcement of mutual, beneficial and cooperative relations with all countries and consolidates the country's image as a peace loving, politically stable and democratic member of the world community. Bangladesh has already made a good number of success stories in its political, economic and social sectors and reiterated her commitment to the world peace and to building an open, free, pluralistic society free of poverty. However, the main constraints and future challenges of Bangladesh's foreign policy persist with her geographical location, underdevelopment and overpopulation. In the era of globalization, Bangladesh, like other developing countries, is confronted with threats emanating from both external and internal sources like terrorism, drug and human trafficking, poverty, political instability, climate change, etc

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