

Address of Welcome  
By Dr. Quazi Shahabuddin, DG, BIDS

Honourable Chief Advisor of the Caretaker Government, Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, Professor Rehman Sobhan, Guest of Honour in today's Launching Ceremony, Dr. Mahabub Hossain, Former Director General of BIDS and Executive Director, BRAC, Dr. Mirza Md. Azizul Islam, Honourable Advisor for Finance, Planning, Commerce, Post & Telecommunications and Chairman, BIDS Board of Trustees, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my great privilege to welcome you all in the launching ceremony of the Golden Jubilee Celebration of BIDS. BIDS, the largest and the oldest social science organization in the country completes 50 years of its establishment this year. BIDS started its journey in Pakistan as the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) in June 1957. After independence, it was named as the Bangladesh Institute of Development Economics (BIDE). A Parliament Charter was awarded in 1974 and the Institute was renamed as the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) to reflect the multi-disciplinary focus of its development research. The Institute has traversed a long, sometimes arduous but colourful journey to become what it is today, a premier multi-disciplinary organization engaged in policy-oriented research on critical development issues primarily in the context of Bangladesh. It is against this historical backdrop that we are celebrating the Golden Jubilee of BIDS.

Golden Jubilee is undoubtedly an occasion of celebration and festivity; but it also gives an opportunity to reflect upon past achievement and more importantly, to have a prospective view of what can and should be accomplished in the coming years.

**Distinguished Guests,**

The focus of BIDS research has undergone significant changes to reflect evolving national priorities and policy reforms over the last three decades or so.

During the Pakistani Period, research was focused largely on industry and trade-related issues. With changes in socio-economic conditions, BIDS has shifted its attention to diverse areas, such as globalization, macroeconomic issues, agriculture and rural development, water resources management, poverty and inequality, food security,

microcredit, health, nutrition, education, energy, environment, gender, empowerment, migration, urbanization and other development issues.

During the 1960s, much of the attention was focused on economic disparity between the eastern and the western wings of the country. In fact, the Institute emerged under the dynamic leadership of Prof. Nurul Islam, as the vanguard of the ‘two-economy theory’, along with a number of eminent economists from Dhaka University including Prof. Rehman Sobhan, which led to the demand for provincial autonomy and subsequently to the emergence of independent Bangladesh.

After independence, the focus of BIDS research naturally shifted to agriculture and rural development. BIDS was involved in two large-scale reviews and stock-taking of agricultural research and policies in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Agricultural Sector Review deserve special mention. Attention was also given to specific issues, such as food security and livelihood systems in the rural areas. Environmental issues also began to emerge as a major problem in the context of sustainable development. Gradually, the focus of research shifted from the micro-level livelihood issues to broader macro-views as well as to global factors impinging upon it.

Poverty related research has always featured prominently in BIDS. How to operationalise ‘pro-poor growth’ became an important area of research since the 1990s. A comprehensive research was also undertaken to gain deeper insights of those who are chronically poor, of the process that keep them in poverty and also of the policy interventions that will help them to overcome poverty and vulnerability.

With the emergence of microcredit as a powerful instrument of poverty alleviation and women’s empowerment, a number of in-depth research was undertaken by BIDS to evaluate the impact of microcredit in the light of both Grameen Bank experience and use of funds mediated through PKSF to microfinance organizations in rural Bangladesh.

Issues related to human resource development have received increasingly more prominence in the research agenda of the Institute. The preparation of the National Human Development Report 2000 is worth mentioning in this context.

BIDS has also been closely involved in the planning process, especially in the preparation of development plans in Bangladesh. More recently, BIDS researchers were involved in drafting most of the Thematic Group reports which were subsequently used in the preparation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) of Bangladesh.

Perhaps it would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that the research carried out by BIDS during the 1980s and 1990s has not only contributed to more informed public decision making, but also in fine tuning the reform agenda (in terms of both speed and sequencing of reforms) under the Structural Adjustment Programmes and also in making the much-needed mid-course corrections to ensure that the policy reforms are pragmatic, home-grown and responsive to the socio-economic or even political compulsion as well as to the overriding need of the Bangladesh economy for rapid growth and accelerated poverty reduction.

### **Distinguished Guests,**

Over the last 50 years, research outputs of the Institute, as I have just mentioned, have provided valuable inputs to the policy makers and development practitioners for designing appropriate development interventions. However, the contribution of BIDS has remained less than its potential due to persistence gap between research and policy making. As such, there is considerable scope of improving the environment in which there could be greater synergy between BIDS and the government agencies in general and the Planning Commission in particular.

BIDS occupies a unique position, as this is the only socio-economic research organization with a Parliamentary Charter which gives it wide and effective autonomy even with government financial support, thereby enabling it to make significant contributions to the development of national policy agenda at both macro and sectoral levels.

We firmly believe that in order to enhance BIDS's capacity to attain the goals laid down in its Charter, to further enhance its national and international standing, and to realize its full potential, it is essential that individual researcher's energies be redirected towards the formulation and implementation of a coherent research agenda responsive to the changing needs of the Bangladesh economy.

The next decade is critical for Bangladesh for making a definite break with the past and moving towards a new paradigm which can be built around the incremental possibilities of the existing opportunities and adopting newer initiatives. These are critical for Bangladesh to move to a higher growth path and launch a scaled-up attack on poverty. In fact, a systematic and comprehensive strategic framework will be needed to facilitate informed policy and decision-making, set and reset priorities and guide the implication of the policies in an effective and accountable manner. Such an approach, to be a realistic guide to policy-making, must be based on solid analytical and rigorous empirical research. I can assure you that BIDS is well aware of its responsibilities in this regard and will put all its efforts to address these emerging realities and challenges of the Bangladesh economy in the context of globalization.

### **Distinguished Guests,**

Let me now give you some idea of the (tentative) program of our Golden Jubilee Celebration. Following this launching ceremony, a special seminar on "Development Concerns in Bangladesh: Revisiting Selected Issues" is scheduled to be held on July 31, 2007. Three presentations will be made in the Seminar on such topics as: (1) Pro-poor growth: Recent experience and Future routes, (2) Globalization and Re-emerging Food Insecurity in Bangladesh and (3) Energy for Development in Bangladesh. This is expected to be followed by organizing a series of Seminar and Roundtable on diverse topics between August, 2007 and November, 2007 under the umbrella of what we have termed as "Gyan Mela". The Golden Jubilee Celebration will be rounded off with an intensive week of professional activities (preferably in the second week of December, 2007). This would include, among others, (a) an International Conference on "Development Prospects of Bangladesh: Emerging Challenges", in which distinguished national and international experts are expected to participate and (b) Public Speeches by distinguished personalities. We hope to bring out several volumes of special publication including those based on Conference

Proceedings, and Research Brief based on selected research carried out by BIDS researchers over the last three decades or so.

All these obviously will require funds. We thank the World Bank and the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development for responding generously to our requests for sponsoring various events, including the International Conference. Also, we have received positive response from the Bangladesh Bank, Bank Asia, City Bank, and Prime Bank to name a few.

Before concluding, I would like to express our gratitude to Honourable Chief Advisor, Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed who despite his very busy schedule has kindly consented to be the Chief Guest in the Launching Ceremony. We are grateful to Professor Rehman Sobhan for kindly agreeing to be with us here today as the Guest of Honour and deliver the keynote address. I would like to specially thank Dr. Mahabub Hossain, former DG, BIDS and Executive Director, BRAC for responding to our request to be the special guest on the occasion. Finally, we are indebted to Dr. Mirza Md. Azizul Islam, Honourable Advisor for Finance, Planning, Commerce, Post & Telecommunications and Chairman, BIDS Board of Trustees for kindly agreeing to chair this important event.

### **Distinguished Guests,**

BIDS has completed its first 50 years of establishment; and hopefully, will complete many more. “Development Research with Social Commitment” as our motto, we shall continue to move forward, with your goodwill, support and cooperation and towards a glorious future.

Thanks for your patient hearing and joining us in our Golden Jubilee Celebration.