

Report No. 32

**BANGLADESH-EU DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP:
EMERGING CHALLENGES IN THE
CONTEXT OF GLOBALISATION**

Centre for Policy Dialogue

House No 40/C, Road No 11, Dhanmondi R/A, GPO Box 2129, Dhaka-1205, Bangladesh

Tel: 8124770; Fax: 8130951; E-mail: cpd@bdonline.com

Website: www.cpd-bangladesh.org

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The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), established in 1993, is an innovative initiative to promote an ongoing process of dialogue between the principal partners in the decision making and implementing process. The dialogues are designed to address important policy issues and to seek constructive solutions to these problems. The Centre has already organised a series of such major dialogues at local, regional and national levels. These dialogues have brought together ministers, opposition front benchers, MPs, business leaders, NGOs, donors, professionals and other functional groups in civil society within a non-confrontational environment to promote focused discussions. The expectation of the CPD is to create a national policy consciousness where members of civil society will be made aware of critical policy issues affecting their lives and will come together in support of particular policy agendas which they feel are conducive to the well being of the country. The CPD has also organised a number of South Asian bilateral and regional dialogues as well as some international dialogues.

*In support of the dialogue process the Centre is engaged in research programmes which are both serviced by and are intended to serve as inputs for particular dialogues organised by the Centre throughout the year. Some of the major research programmes of CPD include **The Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD), Governance and Development, Population and Sustainable Development, Trade Policy Analysis and Multilateral Trading System and Leadership Programme for the Youth.** The CPD also carries out periodic public perception surveys on policy issues and developmental concerns.*

*As part of CPD's publication activities, a CPD Dialogue Report series is brought out in order to widely disseminate the summary of the discussions organised by the Centre. The present report contains the highlights of the dialogue organised by CPD, which was held at the CIRDAP Auditorium, Dhaka on May 21, 2000 on the theme of **Bangladesh-EU Development Partnership: Emerging Challenges in the Context of Globalisation.***

Report prepared by: Mr Quazi Hasnat Shahriar, Research Associate, CPD

Assistant Editor: Ms Ayesha Banu, Coordinator (Dialogue & Communication), CPD

Editorial Advisor: Mr Syed Badrul Ahsan

Series Editor: Professor Rehman Sobhan, Chairman, CPD

Dialogue on

**BANGLADESH-EU DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP:
EMERGING CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEXT OF
GLOBALISATION**

i) The Dialogue

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), as part of its dialogue programme, concomitant to the Bangladesh-EU agreement signed on May 22, 2000 in Brussels, organised a dialogue on *Bangladesh-EU Development Partnership: Emerging Challenges in the Context of Globalisation* on May 21, 2000 at Hotel Sheraton, Dhaka. Professor Rehman Sobhan, Chairman, CPD, moderated the dialogue, which was attended by Mr. Abul Hassan Chowdhury, MP, Honorable Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh (GOB), Mr. Morshed Khan, MP, former Special Envoy of the Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Antonio de Souza Menezes, Ambassador, Commission of the European Communities. Apart from Mr. UWE Schramm, Ambassador, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr. Finn Thilsted, Ambassador, Royal Danish Embassy, Mr. Ronald P Hicks, Resident Representative, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Mr. Narhari Rao, Senior Economist, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Mr. Paul Walters, Economic Advisor, DFID, British High Commission, the dialogue was also notable through the participation of a cross section of policy makers, diplomats, politicians, government officials, academics, experts, business leaders and leading figures of various civil society groups (list of the participants is attached at the end of this report as *Annex 2*). This dialogue report presents a summary of the keynote presentation made by Professor Mustafizur Rahman, Research Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue, and briefly captures the main points of the interactive discussion and exchanges which followed Professor Rahman 's presentation.

Initiating the Dialogue

Welcoming the dialogue participants Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya noted that the dialogue was being held just a day before the Bangladesh-EU *New Cooperation Agreement* was to be signed in Brussels. In principle, such a major bilateral agreement

should have been put under public scrutiny with an adequate time, he observed. Professor Sobhan initiated the dialogue by acknowledging the close cooperation between Bangladesh and the community of European nations as represented by the EU. Professor Rehman Sobhan set the dialogue in motion by noting that the existing interactive engagement would benefit the participants by allowing them to have a fruitful discussion on a number of key issues regarding Bangladesh's relationship with the EU. He pointed out that it was an appropriate time to join with the EU within the ambit of civil society in an interactive dialogue to address a shared future at a point when the country's Minister for Commerce was on the verge of signing the agreement in Brussels. He remarked that in recent past the EU has emerged as a major trading partner of Bangladesh and there were possibilities of further strengthening of this partnership in view of the globalisation and significant market openings in the EU.

Professor Sobhan presented his view on the increasing importance of trade for Bangladesh's economic development by emphasising that at present it is an accepted wisdom that trade plays a crucial role in eradicating poverty. In this context, he cited the example of the export-oriented ready-made garments industry of Bangladesh which had been a major source of employment to the poor women of the country and thus has served as an important step towards the alleviation of poverty in Bangladesh. He thought that the EU has a particular role to play in sustaining Bangladesh's access to the European market. According to Professor Sobhan the EU has important role to play not only in ensuring sustainability of Bangladesh's export sector performance and in helping to promote export diversification but also through direct contribution to poverty alleviation in Bangladesh by active support to income generating activities in the country.

Professor Sobhan referred to the dialogue participants as an impressive cross-section of people who included various strata of the civil society and also the development partners. Together they represented a collective political interest in maintaining and sustaining the relationship between Bangladesh and the EU. According to Professor Sobhan the issue of Bangladesh-EU relationship was a bipartisan one, in which enormous significance has been placed on the nature of a dynamic economic

relationship between partners which had far-reaching implications extending into all segments of the society.

ii) A Précis of the Background Paper

The background paper, *Bangladesh-EU Development Relationship: Major Features and Emerging Issues*, presented by Professor Mustafizur Rahman noted major milestones in Bangladesh-EU relationship and the importance of the EU as a global player and covered a number of issues which were instrumental in governing future relations between Bangladesh and the EU. The paper mainly focused on three issues: a. Current status of Bangladesh-EU relationship; b. Salient features of the new Cooperation Agreement; c. Important emerging challenges in the context of evolving Bangladesh-EU relationship. The paper discussed the first issue from three perspectives: traditional aid relationship; growing importance of trade relationship and recently emerging investment relationship.

Bangladesh-EU Aid Relationship

The paper analysed the nature of the Bangladesh-EU aid relationship through making note of the fact that Bangladesh is the second largest aid recipient of the EU in Asia (following India) and tops the list of EC food aid recipients globally. Of interest here is the fact that, the EC channels all its aid in the form of grants although member countries offer part of their respective aid in the form of loans.

In discussing the trend of aid from the EU, the keynote speaker noted that the actual disbursement of EU aid has come down significantly over the last five years, mainly on account of Bangladesh's inability to utilise the committed funds. Thus, although commitments over this period increased from \$254.5 million to \$437.3 million, or by 71.8 per cent, actual disbursement of EU funds have come down from \$244.5 million to \$194.2 million, or by 20.6 per cent during the matching period.

During the first period of EC cooperation, the emphasis of project interventions was on infrastructural development (in areas such as irrigation and roads, etc.) and on

rural development programmes (agricultural production and integrated rural development programmes). While both sectors have continued to remain important, in the past few years, new projects have covered the social sectors (health, education, social mobilisation, etc.). These projects emphasise the need for grassroots development to assist the poorest groups, especially women, through improvement in their living conditions and social status. In addition to project assistance, the EC has also provided food aid (590 Mecu) and emergency assistance (101 Mecu) to Bangladesh.

In analysing the structure of aid, the paper noted that in 1998/99, the EU's share in the \$176.9 million of food aid under grant received by Bangladesh was 15.6 per cent, whilst the share in the \$373.4 million project aid under grant was 43.9 per cent. In other words, almost 90 per cent of the EU's grant in aid to Bangladesh was channeled as project aid and about 10 per cent count as food aid. During the same period, the total aid (disbursement) from the EU to Bangladesh was US\$ 194.12 million (US\$ 27.52 million as food aid, US\$ 0.50 million as commodity aid and US\$ 149.67 million as project aid) of which total grant was US\$ 191.74 million and total loan was US\$ 2.38 million.

Although EC assistance to Bangladesh started as a classic food aid operation, the food aid policy was subsequently reformed into EC development policy which integrated food aid with agricultural inputs within the broad ambit of food security. Annual average disbursement of EU (EC+15) aid in Bangladesh over the last three years was about 15 per cent of total aid (or about 225 million *Euro*). The EC and member countries, in recent years, in line with the evolution of the donors' mainstream strategy, have targeted their aid mainly at poverty reduction projects.

One salient feature of EC cooperation in Bangladesh is that the EC has implemented a significant part of its development cooperation programmes through various local NGOs by way of co-financing. A fourth of the total funds committed to various development projects in Bangladesh, amounting to about 100 Mecu, is channeled through this type of financing. Channeling increasingly more funds through the NGOs has been an important feature of EU aid policy in recent years. Some major on-going

projects implemented by the government of Bangladesh and NGOs with assistance from the EU are *Adarsha Gram I, FPHP, Integrated Food Assisted Development Programme (IFADEP), NFPE, Vulnerable Group Development Project (VGD) and PROSHIKA Poverty Alleviation Phase V.*

Bangladesh-EU Trade Relationship

The paper dwelt at length on Bangladesh-EU trade relationship by analysing the dynamics of exports to the EU, structures of the exports, the rate of EU GSP utilisation and the dynamics of imports from the EU. The first agreement signed between Bangladesh and the EU in 1976 was, in principle, a *commercial cooperation agreement*. Since then the EU as a group has become the foremost trading partner of Bangladesh. Bangladesh exported \$ 2.46 billion worth of commodities to the 15 EU member countries in 1998/99, which was 46.50 per cent of its total annual exports and was a significant rise from the 32.4 per cent posted a decade earlier. Amongst the 15 EU member countries, Germany topped the list (11.8 per cent) in terms of market share followed by UK (9.3 per cent) and France (6.5 per cent).

Sectoral analysis of Bangladesh's exports by destination reveals that the EU is the single most important importer of knitwear from Bangladesh. The EU accounted for 69.2 per cent of total *knitwear exports* of the country in 1998/99. In case of woven-RMG, the EU ranks second, after the USA, accounting for 46.6 per cent of total exports of *woven-RMG*. Within the EU, Germany was the premier export market of Bangladesh in both woven (15.6 per cent) and knit-RMG (14.1 per cent). In case of export of *leather*, the EU ranked first with a share of 35.6 per cent of total export in FY 1999. Here Italy was the foremost importer, accounting for 22.8 per cent of total exports in FY 1999. The EU accounted for 35.2 per cent of total exports of frozen food, mainly shrimp, from Bangladesh in FY 1999, a close second to the USA whose share was 36.1 per cent. Among the EU countries, the UK was the largest importer of frozen food with a share of 13.1 per cent of the total exports from Bangladesh, followed by Belgium with 9.8 per cent.

The paper mentioned the fact that Bangladesh receives duty free access for its products into the EU under the *Generalised System of Preference* (GSP) scheme which provides preferential tariff treatment to Bangladeshi exports to the EU markets. However, since Bangladesh sometimes has been unable to comply with the stringent EU rules of origin for GSP, it has been difficult for exporters to take full advantage of the market access opportunity offered under the EC GSP scheme.

Over the recent years, GSP utilisation rate of Bangladesh has deteriorated significantly - from 43.2 per cent in 1994/95 to only 27.3 per cent in 1996/97. This has been mainly due to Bangladesh's inability to comply with the *three-stage conversion* requirement for woven-RMG. The GSP utilisation rate for knit-RMG has registered considerable improvement since 1999, thanks to the EC's change of rules of origin under the two stage conversion which now allows imported yarn for knit fabrics to qualify for GSP. The facility of quota-free access is critically important for Bangladesh since exports from all major competitors of Bangladesh in the EU market have restricted entry because of quota. Such quotas are scheduled to be eliminated in the year 2005 under new WTO-initiated rules.

The EU is the second largest trading partner of Bangladesh as far as imports are concerned. In 1998/99 the EU accounted for 9.5 per cent of total imports by Bangladesh, second only to India (15.4 per cent) and far ahead of both the USA (3.7 per cent) and Japan (6.1 per cent). In terms of form of transaction in 1998/99, more than 87 per cent of imports from the EU by Bangladesh is done through payment in cash. As far as imports under loan component are concerned, the EU's share is 12.5 per cent, second only to Japan, whose share is about 15.8 per cent. Amongst the EU member states, the UK topped the list accounting for about 26.4 per cent of Bangladesh's import in 1998/99 followed by Germany (20.8 per cent) and France (10.3 per cent). Products of chemical and allied industries, machinery and transport equipment and base metals constituted Bangladesh's major imports from the EU in FY 1999.

Bangladesh-EU Investment Relationship

Flow of private direct investment from the EU countries to Bangladesh, in spite of an overall upturn, has tended to fluctuate quite considerably since the mid-1990s. Net inflow of FDI from the EU peaked in 1996/97 when it reached \$217.8 million, to come to about \$100.0 million in the following year. It seems that net inflow has registered a significant rise in 1999, mainly thanks to investments from the UK. As a matter of fact, almost all of the incremental net FDI during the last three and half years (1997-99) was accounted for by the UK, mainly owing to its investments in Bangladesh's power and gas sector.

Many EU member states, including UK, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and Netherlands have signed agreements on investment protection/promotion and avoidance of double taxation with the government of Bangladesh. A total of 106 companies are currently operating in Bangladesh, of which about three-fourths are 100 per cent foreign owned and one-fourth are joint venture companies. Pharmaceuticals, chemicals, electronics and services are some of the major areas of EU investment interest in Bangladesh. A number of companies are found to be registered with the *Board of Investment* (BOI) which could be expected to come on-stream in the coming days.

Going by *Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority* (BEPZA) sources, investment from EU countries are a growing presence in the two EPZs of Bangladesh. The share of the EU recorded an increase of 6.5 per cent in total investments in the EPZs by June 1999, from its share of 46 per cent in June 1995. Similar positive movements are also discernible in case of joint ventures as well as 100 per cent foreign owned companies. Here again the UK had the most prominent presence, accounting for almost 80 per cent of EU investment, followed by France whose share was about 5 per cent.

A number of projects have also been taken up in Bangladesh under the various EU schemes including the *European Community Investment Partner Scheme* (ECIP) and the *Asia Investment Programme*. A few years ago, with assistance of the ECIP scheme, which is a global initiative for Asia, Latin America and Mediterranean countries, the

Dutch-Bangla Bank was established. A number of other projects, including the Beximco Belgia Joint Venture for utilising nuclear radiation for preservation, joint venture glucose fluid factory of Orion Group (with an Italian company) and a joint venture unit for processing of shrimp have also been initiated. The *European Investment Bank* (EIB) is assisting the *Islam Group* with an investment of 30 million *Euro* to set up a French-Bangladesh joint venture (*La Farge*) cement factory in Sylhet.

Noticeable Features of the New Cooperation Agreement

The keynote speaker referred to the following features of the New Agreement:

- The New Agreement takes a more comprehensive approach to the development partnership compared to the earlier one, taking into cognisance Bangladesh's major constraints and the emerging opportunities in a globalised economy.
- It broadly follows the guideline which is mentioned in the EU's *Asia and Latin America (ALA) strategy* and takes synergy from the bilateral strategies of the EC member states in Bangladesh, and draws on their complementarities.
- It reflects the EU's approach in the context of globalisation, encompassing issues like environment, human rights, intellectual property rights, labour rights, decentralisation, privatisation, and governance. However, whether these will be applied as conditionalities for EU development assistance is not yet clear.
- It is characterised by four main objectives: 1. Supporting sustainable economic and social development with particular emphasis on interests of the poor, and the women; 2. Stimulating two-way trade in accordance with WTO provisions, and assisting Bangladesh in diversifying its productive potentials; 3. Promoting investment and economic, technical and cultural links; and 4. Attempting to maintain a balance between development policies and the issue of protection and conservation of the natural environment.
- The agreement focuses on nine key areas of cooperation: 1. Development cooperation; 2. Trade and commercial cooperation; 3. Environmental cooperation; 4. Economic cooperation; 5. Regional cooperation; 6. Cooperation in Science and Technology; 7. Drug Precursor Chemicals and Money Laundering; 8. Human Resource Development; 9. Information, Culture and Communication.

- ❑ The Agreement puts *poverty alleviation* at the heart of the EU's cooperation strategy for Bangladesh by attempting a focused approach of development cooperation with small targeted programmes aimed at development of micro and SMEs and their modernisation, with emphasis on skills enhancement and training.
- ❑ It emphasises environmental protection. The EC has agreed to provide technical assistance to put in adequate legislative measures and transfer of appropriate technology in this regard.
- ❑ The issue of promoting private investment from the EU member countries in Bangladesh is mentioned in the Agreement. However, the modalities have not been concretised.
- ❑ It projects a concern for proper implementation of the various WTO provisions by Bangladesh and elimination of the remaining non-tariff barriers.
- ❑ The issue of freedom of association of the workers and the right to organise by the trade unions has also been spelt out explicitly in the proposed Agreement.

The New Agreement perceives the role of the state as a regulatory one barring a few areas such as health and R&D.

There is no clear indication in the proposed Agreement as to how financial resources will be mobilised for implementing many of the objectives set out in the agreement.

Emerging Issues

The New Agreement indeed embraces a wide range of issues; however, some important ones still remain to be addressed if the Bangladesh-EU relationship is to develop more effectively in the future. Some of those issues are as under:

- ❑ Low utilisation of GSP by Bangladesh.
- ❑ Promotion of Bangladesh's export competitiveness.
- ❑ Technology transfer.

- ❑ EU's concrete commitment as regards Bangladesh's requirement of about US\$ 300 million for technical assistance which was estimated the *Integrated Framework Initiative* of the six major multilateral agencies.
- ❑ Stimulating initiatives along the lines of the one taken by the EIB.
- ❑ Impact of the emergence of the European single currency, the euro, on Bangladesh-EU trade relationship.
- ❑ Multi-stakeholder participation in designing an effective Bangladesh - EU partnership.

iii) Discussion

Changing Nature of Bangladesh's External Relationship

Initiating the floor discussion following Professor Mustafizur Rahman's presentation, Professor Sobhan, the dialogue moderator, pointed out the changing nature of Bangladesh's external relationship. Through the 1990s, Bangladesh emerged as a trade dependent economy from its previous position of an aid dependent economy. This is a significant transformation in Bangladesh's external relations which should be kept in the perspective in defining Bangladesh-EU relationship, Professor Sobhan observed.

Assenting with Professor Sobhan, Mr M Shamsul Islam, MP, also noted that Bangladesh is now more concerned with trade than aid. He also referred to the fact that at any meeting with development partners, Bangladesh at present shows more interest in trade issues than in aid issues. Mr Morshed Khan, MP, added that the proportion of aid in ADP at present is less than 50 per cent of what it earlier used to be. This trend, he noted, had set in since 1991. He also referred to the fact that remittances exceeded the amount of aid currently disbursed in Bangladesh. He also noted that the gross value of RMG exports far exceeded that of aid.

Bangladesh-EU Relationship: the Context of Aid

Professor Sobhan observed that although, EU is a major donor there are some major weaknesses which inhibited the utilization of the EU aid in Bangladesh. He identified the changing agendas of the aid coming into Bangladesh from the EU and drew

attention of the participants to the current emphasis of the EU on issues such as governance, human rights, democracy and poverty. He pointed out that this emphasis, whilst welcome, did not always posit a coherent set of perspectives on the problems facing the country at present.

Khairul Anam, former ambassador to the European Union, acknowledged the role of the EU as a major donor of aid for Bangladesh. He pointed out that at present, Bangladesh is the second largest recipient of aid from the EU. Syed Jamaluddin, Secretary General, FBCCI, expressed his concern about the declining trend of aid from the EU. He also thought that Dhaka should try to achieve better disbursement targets. M M Rezaul Karim, a former diplomat, also showed his concern about the declining trend of aid and pointed to domestic political conditions as the cause. Minister Abul Hassan Chowdhury, in spite of his acknowledgement of the country's transformation in terms of the shift from aid-dependence to trade-dependence, indicated that the EU's commitment to aid has been going down and this he thought to be a significant development in defining Bangladesh's relations with the EU.

Bangladesh-EU Relationship: the Context of Trade

A number of the participants considered GSP to be an importance factor in defining the relationship between EU and Bangladesh in the area of trade. GSP played a crucial role in sustaining both higher volume of trade as well as its diversity. This GSP significance would grow in future specially in view of the phasing out of the quota by the year 2005. Mr M R Osmany, former foreign secretary, Government of Bangladesh, hoped that a new trend would be set in trade and development by the EU through future relationships and the new accord would usher in a new era in this relationship.

In response to the suggestion put forward in the background paper that the EU retains stringent GSP rules, Zillul Hye Razi, Economic and Information Officer, Commission of the European Communities, mentioned that there is an internal conflict in the argument itself. He said that if the EU relaxes the GSP rules, Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) would be the first to protest, as this would be perceived to be

hampering the interests of the local textile industries by allowing the use of imported raw materials for GSP eligibility.

Investment in Bangladesh: Role of the EU

Another related issue within the domain of Bangladesh-EU relationship, as Professor Sobhan pointed out, is the nature of investment flows from the EU into Bangladesh and their linkages with the dynamics of trade relationships. According to him, the actual level of investment is significantly below the level which was desirable. The EU is now taking collective rather than national perspective in its investment strategies in developing countries. Correspondingly, investors from the EU would tend to view the region not as separate countries such as Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, but rather as South Asia as a whole and look at the region as a prospective integrated market. As a result, investors would be interested to invest in three or four investment projects across the region, each linked with another as part of a holistic investment approach. As a result, the state of regional cooperation also comes to play an important role in realising the potential EU investment in the region.

Mohammad Golam Mostafa of Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters' Association referred to the lack of investment to enhance production technology which he thought was necessary for capacity building in the export-oriented sectors in Bangladesh.

Main Features of the New Agreement

In a discussion on the features of the New Agreement, Antonio de Souza Menezes, Ambassador, Commission of the European Communities, mentioned that the New Agreement would enhance the scope and intensity of relationship between the EU and Bangladesh and it would go beyond the limited objectives of the predominantly commercial cooperation scheme of 1976. The EU, he said, is now looking forward to the prospects of deepening cooperation between the EU and Bangladesh in the development of trade, commerce and regional economic integration, environment, science, technology, human resource development, culture and communication.

UWE Schramm, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, indicated that the New Agreement would be a different one from the previous agreements existing between the EU and Bangladesh. He pointed out that this agreement comes in the name of Third Generation Agreement and incorporates new features concerning various political elements. This can be explicated in two ways:

- The New Agreement takes into account issues other than aid and trade. In this relation, the most important point to be noted is the fact that Article 1 of the agreement makes it clear that respect of human rights and democratic principles is the basis of this agreement.
- The signing of such an agreement implies that there are some values common to both sides. The New Agreement is a highly political one since it carries an obligation for both sides to safeguard human rights and democratic principles.

Syed Jamaluddin registered his perception of the New Agreement by mentioning that though it contains the provision of zero tariff, there is no concrete opportunity for Bangladesh. M M Rezaul Karim marked the distinction of the New Agreement from the previous one by noting the fourteen democratic values mentioned in it. On his part, Toufiq Ali, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, identified the New Agreement as one established between unequal partners and recognized some interesting provisions in it, such as the provision of TRIPs. He also expressed his surprise at the fact that though some of the provisions are covered by multilateral conventions and agreements, they had once again been brought under the purview of a bilateral agreement.

Antonio de Souza Menezes indicated that the New Agreement radically refocuses its attention on the objectives of the eradication of poverty. In this regard, the EU has set three main approaches:

- Development, cooperation and financial aid will be focused directly at the poorest countries of the world.
- Intensive political dialogue will be held.

- Trade and economic cooperation will be enhanced to facilitate smooth and gradual integration of developing countries into the global economy.

Intervening at this stage, Toufiq Ali suggested that Bangladesh be cognizant of the impacts of the New Agreement. He noted three focal points, given existing circumstances:

- Almost 75 per cent of total FDI remains within the developed countries. Very little comes to LDCs such as Bangladesh. Would any special provision of the New Agreement be able to address this issue?
- In world trade, the share of LDCs such as Bangladesh has been declining over time. Would the New Agreement be able to promote Bangladesh's trade through capacity building?
- Aid is showing a declining trend in importance in total financial flows going from DAC member countries to LDCs. The proportion of aid in official development finance has gone down from 75 per cent to 25 per cent. Would the New Agreement be able to address this issue?

Bangladesh-EU Relations: The Emerging Concerns

For the last 25 years Bangladesh and the EU have enjoyed a growing and successful relationship. For Bangladesh this has meant some 7 billion euro in development assistance since 1971. However, perspective of donor-reipient relationship are changing. The traditional pattern of the donor country and the dominant partner unilaterally setting a global and globalising agenda, needs to be reviewed. The mutuality of the relationship has to be taken into account in the context of emerging state of Bangladesh-EU relations. This will depend on the extent to which the EU views Bangladesh as a genuine stakeholder and partner. Owing to these reasons, Antonio de Souza Menezes pointed out, the Commission of the European Communities in Bangladesh had been striving for periodic consultations and dialogue with the civil society of the country with a view to designing a result-oriented bilateral relationship.

Antonio de Souza Menezes mentioned that in the coming months the EU would be holding a series of contacts with the government of Bangladesh to identify the priorities under the New Agreement. Subsequently, the respective proposals would be sent to the EC-Bangladesh joint commission, a meeting of which would take place before the end of the year. Through these procedures, he expected, the EU would come up with a new country strategy.

According to Menezes, the potential for action and impact has to be better exploited. The new EC development policy has therefore identified six areas where action could be concentrated:

1. Trade for development.
2. Regional integration and cooperation.
3. Macroeconomic policy linked with the reduction of poverty, emphasis being on social sectors like health and education.
4. Reliable and sustainable transport which would play a key role in providing access to basic social services.
5. Food security and sustainable rural development.
6. Institutional capacity building, good governance and rule of law.

Syed Jamaluddin, hinting at the possibility of Bangladesh facing difficulties in availing of the facilities provided by the New Agreement in terms of zero tariff facility, thought that the EU had a responsibility to ensure that Bangladesh gets duty free market access in the EU. M. Anwar Hashem, a former diplomat, expressed his optimism that the EU could help Dhaka achieve the objectives which the LDCs as a group were unable to attain at the failed Seattle Ministerial.

The Concept of Globalisation and its Perception

The term *globalisation* turned out to be the catch phrase during the whole discussion. Almost everyone appeared to be concerned with various dimensions of globalisation. Many participants were prone to look at the emerging Bangladesh-EU relationship from the perspective of globalisation and the evolving global context.

Antonio Menezes described the present time as one of radical political and economic global change through a rapidly growing globalisation of trade.

Saifur Rahman, MP, former Finance Minister, asserted that globalisation is a trend, not a truth. He thought that it was becoming a menace for the new entrants and, also in some cases, for sustainability of the democratic institutions in many countries. Gradually, it would become more difficult for Bangladeshi firms to compete with multinational enterprises, he observed. Agreeing with Saifur Rahman, M Shamsul Islam asserted that the process of globalisation is facing resistance not only for unmerited reasons but also for many apt reasons. Criticizing the discriminatory results of globalisation, Morshed Khan, MP, former special envoy of the Prime Minister, quoted Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the UN, to underscore the fact that the process of globalisation is bringing unimaginable benefits to one part of mankind, while it remains apathetic to conditions of poverty, malnutrition and distress in other parts of the globe. He portrayed the impacts of globalisation as follows:

- ❑ It makes a majority of the world population hamstrung in the decision making process.
- ❑ Issues of poverty alleviation, gender discrimination, income discrimination, environmental degradation and technology gap have been neglected.
- ❑ It causes volatility in the market in terms of prices, interest rates and terms of trade.

Syed Jamaluddin, echoing Morshed Khan, voiced the thought that he found many challenges but few opportunities for least developed countries like Bangladesh.

Abul Hassan Chowdhury, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs referred to globalisation as a *mantra* chanted by many with different meanings and purposes. He endorsed Saifur Rahman's perception that the process of globalisation has created an air of confusion and contradiction among people participating in the discourse. At this point he referred to Joseph Stiglitz, former chief economist of the World Bank, who

characterised the prescriptions by the IMF in East Asia as misleading. He also claimed that conditionalities are being inflicted on a discriminatory basis between developed and developing countries, and there are conflicts of ideas even among developed societies, such as those between the US and the EU on issues of agricultural subsidies and between the US and Japan on the issue of anti-dumping. He remarked that Bangladesh is still immature in the world market and it should be given adequate time before being exposed to competition, though up to the present time it has been able to overcome all the strictures. In this connection he mentioned the instance of the ban inflicted on shrimp exports from Bangladesh which the government had been able to tackle. He expressed his hope that the developed countries would be sagacious enough to understand the country-specific realities within the framework of globalisation.

Regional Cooperation

M R Osmany said that the EU has to be considerate while strengthening the relationship with Bangladesh in terms of considering the regional compulsions and realities. Bangladesh is a member of SAARC but it has a big neighbour. He thought that the EU could play a crucial role in ensuring that Bangladesh got a fair deal in regional cooperation. Syed Jamaluddin agreed with him and at the same time expressed his pessimism about the enhancement of regional cooperation through the SAARC.

Zillul Hye Razi mentioned that in 1995 Bangladesh represented SAARC in Brussels to sign an agreement between SAARC and the EC. However, no progress has been visible since the signing of the agreement. He thought that coherence is missing among the members of SAARC, with some members giving prominence to bilateralism in defining the state of cooperation in the SAARC region

In describing the present government's cognition of the impulses of regional cooperation, Abul Hassan Chowdhury reiterated the principle that the government has due respect for SAARC and getting engaged in newer cooperations does not in any way indicate that its commitment to SAARC is being undermined in any way.

Market Access Conditions for Bangladesh in the EU after 2005

Most of the speakers dwelt on the challenges that Bangladesh would face in the liberalised trade regime emerging in the post-2005 phase. At the Seattle WTO Conference, as Toufiq Ali pointed out, there was a tussle between two groups of countries - one of these two groups supported preferential market access by the LDCs whilst the other opposed it.

Khairul Anam expressed his anxiety about the evolving nature of trade relationship between the EU and Bangladesh during the run up to year 2005. He pointed out to the need for heightened preparedness in the face of increasing competition in the world market. In a quota free world, he asserted that China and Taiwan would be major threats for Bangladesh. Although these two countries have at present a restricted market access in the developed country, they have nonetheless been able to capture a large portion of the world market. In a quota-free trading regime, these countries will be strongly positioned to enhance their market-access.

Issue of Labour Movement

Mr Waliur Rahman, a former diplomat and currently Director, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs, expressed his concern that the new cooperation agreement had not been able to relate economic conversation with the issue of labour movement. He thought that the EU should help Bangladesh in promoting the movement of labour into the EU from Bangladesh. M M Rezaul Karim, in agreement with him, mentioned the necessity of ensuring that Bangladesh could enjoy her comparative advantage in cheap labour through enhanced access to the labour market in the EU.

M. Anwar Hashem noted that by 2050 the world population would be eight billion. He opined that in the context of labour movement, globalisation would only produce captive people, and this issue should be dealt dispassionately. Professor Sobhan expressed the opinion that the issue of labour flows needs to move from the concerns of the Ministry of Immigration to the trade negotiating agenda as part of the discussion on trade in services.

Issues of Human Rights, Environment and Labour Standards

The inclusion of human rights, environmental and labour standards as potential conditionalities of cooperation in the New Agreement evoked a fervent debate between the representatives of the EC and the members of the civil society of Bangladesh. Professor Sobhan pointed out that under the new agreement the issues of human rights, environment and labour standards would go a long way in defining Bangladesh-EU relations. Mr Antonio Menezes indicated that these issues would be integrated into all the future strides of the EU. M R Osmany, in the context of these issues, mentioned that these are universal and global in nature, but they are to be maintained in accordance with the different conditions prevailing in different regions, countries and culture. The EU has to take into account that though environmental standards have been given legal sanctions in many European countries, they have not been in Bangladesh.

Finn Thilsted, Ambassador of Denmark, while agreeing with the necessity to take into account the diverse perspectives on the issue of human rights, expressed his doubt as regards the attitude towards the nature of human rights – whether they should be general in nature or be specific depending on particular culture and country. He himself believed that there are some universal standards to be maintained within the domain of these issues. Corruption, as he mentioned, is a case in point, which is something that no society should tolerate.

M. Anwar Hashem former ambassador, agreed with the Danish envoy and mentioned the universality of the nature of human rights and labour standards. He thought, though, that they were being selectively applied, politicised and very often being viewed subjectively, not objectively.

Democracy and Good Governance

Khairul Anam was of the view that Bangladesh would need to place high importance on democracy and good governance if it is to benefit from the New Agreement. M R Osmany pointed out that, although the idea of good governance is global in nature, the EU has to understand the notion of relativity inherent in it in terms of specific region,

country and culture. In explaining his point he mentioned that the notion of good governance in Europe is not the same as the one which would be applicable in the context of Bangladesh.

Interference of Development Partners in Sensitive Internal Issues

Consideration of the issue of interference and intervention by development partners in Bangladesh's sensitive internal affairs elicited a lively and forthright discussion. Waliur Rahman hoped that Dhaka's development partners would not interfere in areas which concerned the internal policies of development and growth of our democratic country. Contradicting Waliur Rahman, UWE Schramm pointed out that at present Bangladesh and the EU are at a contingency where they have co-responsibilities for those basic values that they share. He thought that confabulation with the intention of sharing views on democracy, rule of law and human rights should not be considered as unsolicited interference in domestic affairs.

Saifur Rahman and Morshed Khan registered their feelings about development partners' interference by saying that this is an issue which haunts Bangladesh whenever the country is engaged in any dialogue with development partners. They thought that as it goes against the notion of Sovereignty, interference in policy matters was not at all desirable. However, Bangladesh had to because of its high dependence on aid.

Disagreeing with Waliur Rahman, M M Rezaul Karim made a distinction between interference and expression of concern, and recognised the EU as a development partner as well as a well-wisher of Bangladesh. He thought that the EU could work as an intermediary body between the government and the opposition parties in an attempt to reduce the political unrest in the country.

Suggestions and Proposals

The participants came up with a number of suggestions which concerned not only the Bangladesh-EU development cooperation but also addressed other broader issues of globalisation:

- M R Osmany proffered that the EU can have dialogue with participation of opposition parties in order to develop a culture-specific concept of good governance..
- M M Rezaul Karim mentioned that certain arrangements should be developed between Bangladesh and the EU to ensure mutually beneficial cooperation during the post 2005 period.
- M. Anwar Hashem proposed that there should be fora independent of the predominance of aid and trade to deal with issues such as human rights and labour standards.
- Mohammad Golam Mostafa suggested that concrete technical assistance needs should be identified where EU could concentrate its assistance.
- M Shamsul Islam advised that Bangladesh should focus its attention on the export of agricultural products as most of our national products come from agriculture while agricultural exports constitutes only 0.8 per cent of total exports. According to him, this can be implemented easily if the agriculture sector gets assistance and preference from the government and the development partners. He suggested that the EU could emulate an important role in this process by providing adequate assistance and concessions to the farming sector of Bangladesh.
- Morshed Khan offered a variety of measures such as wider representation and transparency in decision making process of the international financial bodies, reorientation of their policies, restructuring of their own structures, softening of the aid conditionalities, equitable market access and increased investment flows. He also recommended that the government should increase its revenue collection which would help the country to retrench aid dependency. The thrust of Bangladesh's economic diplomacy, as he argued, should concentrate on securing market access for

exports. According to him, Bangladesh should move away from past policy regime designed by the World Bank and should fashion an autonomous agenda taking into account the valuable features of past policies which merited implementation.

- Abul Hassan Chowdhury, in conformity with Mr Saifur Rahman, recommended that Bangladesh should at first put her own house in order through dialogues and discussions with major stakeholders. This would help the country to define her external policies and which then could be pursued in earnest in future.
- Khairul Anam suggested that Bangladesh should immediately take up a comprehensive study in order to design appropriate strategies to face the emerging challenges specially in view of the major changes which are expected in the post-2005 trade regime.

Concluding Remarks

Presenting his concluding remarks, Professor Rehman Sobhan observed that there had been a lot of affinities in views expressed by the representatives of civil society, adherents of political convictions and the development partners.

He reiterated the need for the country's development partners to take cognisance of the fact about transformation of Bangladesh's economy from an aid-dependent one to a trade-dependent one while tuning their external policies. He emphasised this point by arguing that trade should not be viewed as a political privilege but as a matter of shared economic opportunities based on mutual benefits between two trading partners. He hoped that Bangladesh-EU relations would be guided by this motto. At the same time he also made it clear that Dhaka was not asking for significant gestures of charity, but urging upon the EU to create a level playing field by rendering Bangladesh a degree of preferential access into their markets - the opportunities they had been offering to the ACP countries, Eastern Europe and EU member countries themselves, in order to compensate for our historically inherited least developed status.

Finally, Professor Sobhan put forth the argument that the country would have to first put its political house in order and suggested that the major political parties of the country should communicate with each other and initiate a collective political response to Bangladesh's external relations and the emerging process of globalisation. He brought the dialogue to an end by asserting that such a political response would create a conducive environment where the people of Bangladesh would be able to adequately equip themselves in order to address the challenges and also realise the opportunities stemming from the evolving global order.

Distinguishing Features of the two Cooperation Agreements

Nature of the Agreement	Cooperation Agreement 2000				Commercial Cooperation Agreement 1976			
	Objectives	Strategic Fields	Targeted Strategies	Implementation Procedures	Objectives	Strategic Fields	Targeted Strategies	Implementation Procedures
1. Development Co-operation	Support sustainable social and economic development particularly of the poorest sections with special emphasis on women	<p>a. Poverty alleviation</p> <p>b. Gender issues</p> <p>c. Drug Control and AIDS</p>	<p><i>i. improvement of educational standard</i></p> <p>ii. skill development</p> <p>iii. improvement of living condition of the disadvantaged people</p> <p>i. stop abuse of children and women</p> <p>ii. improvement of economic situation of the women</p> <p>iii. improvement of social environment of the women</p> <p>i. prevention, monitoring and reduction of AIDS</p> <p>ii. strengthening of health facilities for the AIDS victims</p> <p>iii. rehabilitation of drug addicts</p> <p>iv. exchange of relevant information</p> <p>v. prevent drug trafficking</p>	<p>i. setting up of the educational institutions</p> <p>ii. setting up of the vocational training institute</p> <p>iii. safe guarding basic rights of the workers</p> <p>i. improvement of living condition of the disadvantaged people</p> <p>ii. undertake development projects emphasizing on women</p> <p>i. initiate information and educational activities</p> <p>ii. strengthen of treatment compatibilities</p> <p>iii. projects for re-integration of addicts into work & social environment</p> <p>iv. develop protected information exchange system</p> <p>v. prevent the diversion of drug percussive chemicals</p>	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present
2. Trade and Commercial Co-operation	<p>i. create conditions to promote the increase and development of two-way trade in accordance with the WTO rules</p> <p>ii. assist Bangladesh in diversifying its productive potentials</p> <p>iii. monitor anti-dumping procedures</p> <p>iv. improve conditions for effective protection and enforcement of intellectual, industrial and commercial property rights</p>	<p>a. enhancement of competitiveness</p> <p>b. monitoring anti-subsidy</p> <p>c. intellectual property rights</p> <p>d. international maritime transport services</p>	<p><i>a.1. elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers</i></p> <p><i>a.2. improve co-operation in customs matter</i></p> <p><i>b.1. elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers</i></p> <p><i>c.1. implementation of TRIPs</i></p> <p><i>d.1. consider transit/ re-export matters</i></p>	<p>a.1. share information on Anti-dumping and Anti-subsidy</p> <p>a.2. harmonization of custom procedures</p> <p>b.1. monitoring Anti-dumping</p> <p>c.1. active participation in various international conventions</p> <p>c.2. ensure suitable protection of personal data</p> <p>c.3. provide technical assistance</p> <p>d.1. improve exchange of information</p> <p>d.2. provide access to respective public procurement markets on the basis of reciprocity</p> <p>d.3. ensure unrestricted access to the international maritime market and traffic on a commercial basis</p>	Improving the balance and raising the volume of mutual trade to a higher level	a. trade liberalization	<p>a. provide maximum facilities compatible with policies and obligations for</p> <p>b. promote development & diversification of mutual interest products of interest</p>	<p>a. grant each other most-favoured – nation (MFN) treatment</p> <p>b. take appropriate steps to improve export opportunities</p>

Nature of the Agreement	Cooperation Agreement 2000				Commercial Cooperation Agreement 1976			
	Objectives	Strategic Fields	Targeted Strategies	Implementation Procedures	Objectives	Strategic Fields	Targeted Strategies	Implementation Procedures
3. Environmental Co-operation	i. pursue equilibrium between policies for sustainable growth and social development ii. protect and conserve the natural environment	a.I. reduction of environmental risk	a.I. develop an effective environment policy and mobilise resources to implement it a.II. development of sustainable and non polluting energy sources a.III. solution to urban and industrial pollution problems a.IV. establishment of international voice against pollution	a.I.1. protection against natural disaster and soil erosion a.I.2. training, capacity building and transfer of appropriate environmental technology a.II. avoid environment damaging activities a.III. environmental impact assessment a.IV. achievement of the objectives of multilateral environmental agreement	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present
4. Economic Co-operation	promote investment economic, technical and cultural links of mutual interest	a. competitive economic environment b. promote commercial exchanges and investments c. develop small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) d. improve business environment e. energy policy and transfer of appropriate know-how f. private investment	a.I. facilitating the transfer of technology b.I. design better commercial policy c.I. facilitate exchange of information regarding the SMEs d.I. strengthen management training e.I. design better f.I. establish more favourable climate for private investment	a.1. transfer of technology in the fields of design, packaging, standard such as consumer and environmental standard b.1. facilitate contract between economic indicators c.1. improve business and investment environment for the SMEs to get them together d.1. interact effectively with European business environment e.1. promote dialogue between Bangladesh & the EC f.1. create condition for transfer, protection of private investment between the EC & Bangladesh	develop commercial exchange to facilitate mutual benefit in economic and social progress	linking trade with economic co-operation	develop economic co-operation linking with trade in the fields if mutual interest	promote contracts and co-operation between economic organisations
5. Regional co-operation		a. technical assistance b. intra regional trade c. support for regional institution d. studies of regional issues	a.I. training and consultation b.I promote intra regional trade c.I. support regional institutions such as SAARC d.I. support studies on regional/sub	a.1.1. acquire service from outside experts a.1.2. training of the technical staff b.1. promote intra regional trading trade agreement c.1. support inter-regional joint projects and initiatives d.1. support studies on intra regional issues such as transport, environment	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present

Nature of the Agreement	Cooperation Agreement 2000				Commercial Cooperation Agreement 1976			
	Objectives	Strategic Fields	Targeted Strategies	Implementation Procedures	Objectives	Strategic Fields	Targeted Strategies	Implementation Procedures
			<i>regional issues</i>					
6. Co-operation in Science and Technology	promote scientific and technological co-operation in areas of common interest	a. science b. technology	a. co-operation on standards and quality control b. co-operation telecommunication, information society and multimedia applications	a.1. putting in place adequate regulations and policies for telecommunication b.1. promotion of global navigational satellite systems c.1. multi-media technology for telecommunications d.1. telemetric networks and applications	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present
7. Other Strategic Agreements a. Joint Commission	I.a. ensure proper functioning and implementation of the agreement I.b. set priorities I.c. make recommendations I.d. ensure proper functioning of any sectoral agreements	I.I. joint commission composed of representatives from both sides	I.I. co-ordinate the formulation and implementation of programme and project in the frame work of the agreement	I.I setup specialised sub-groups to assist the performance of the commission	a.1. study and device ways to promote trade liberalisation a.2. recommend adoption of policies to stimulate trade and development cooperation	a.1. trade liberalisation a.2. economic co-operation	a.1. device ways to overcome trade barriers a.2. rectify imbalances to maintain complementarity between commercial & economic relation	a.1. facilitate exchange of information a.2. take resources to develop market intelligence, export services and executive performance
b. Consultation	I.a. proper implementation of the agreement through mutual co-operation	I.I. international, economic and commercial issues related to the agreement	I.I. consultation I.II. dialogue I.III. meetings	I.I orgnise meetings and dialogues between the responsible authority	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present
c. Evolutive clause	I.a. expand the agreement and mutual co-operation to specific sectors and sub-sectors	I.I any sector explicitly not covered within the agreement	I.I. agreement on specific sectors or subsection	I.I. make suggestions for widening the scope of the agreement based on previous experience	I.a. expand the agreement on mutual co-operation to specific sectors and sub-sectors	I.I any sector explicitly not covered within the agreement	I.I. agreements on specific sectors or subsection	I.I. identify ways and means for widening the scope of the agreement based on previous experience
d. other agreement	strengthen bilateral agreement between Bangladesh and member states	any issue within the development and co-operation agreement	Facilitate member countries' power to engage in individual co-operation with Bangladesh	allow provisions for bilateral co-operation agreement	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present
e. Non-Execution of the Agreement	provide for modification or execution of the agreement	co-operation agreement	both the parties have the power to rescind the agreement	I. notification about difficulties II. consultation to seek remedies	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present	Not Present

List of Participants

(In alphabetical order)

<i>Mr Clive Allcorn</i>	Head of Commercial Section British High Commission
<i>Mr Toufiq Ali</i>	Additional Secretary Ministry of Foreign Affairs Government of Bangladesh
<i>Mr Shahed Akhtar</i>	Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Government of Bangladesh
<i>Mr Khairul Anam</i>	Former Ambassador to the European Union
<i>Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya</i>	Executive Director Centre for Policy Dialogue
<i>Mr Abul Hassan Chowdhury, MP</i>	Hon'ble Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Government of Bangladesh
<i>Mr Paolo Craviolatti</i>	Third Secretary Commission of the European Communities
<i>Mr M A Halim</i>	Senior Officer EC Delegation
<i>Mr M. Anwar Hashem</i>	Former Ambassador and Secretary Government of Bangladesh
<i>Mr Md Ataul Haque</i>	Private Secretary to former Special Envoy of the Prime Minister
<i>Mr Mohammad Al Haroon</i>	Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Government of Bangladesh
<i>Dr Ute Heinbuch</i>	First Secretary Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany
<i>Mr Ronald P Hicks</i>	Resident Representative International Monetary Fund (IMF)
<i>Mr Jakir Hossain</i>	Research Associate Centre for Policy Dialogue
<i>Mr Anwarul Huq</i>	Consul General of Greece
<i>Mr Robert Hynderick</i>	Food Security Adviser Commission of the European Communities

<i>Mr M Shamsul Islam</i>	Member of Parliament
<i>Proferssor M Nurul Islam</i>	Institute of Appropriate Technology BUET
<i>Ms Tanya Islam</i>	Research Associate Centre for Policy Dialogue
<i>Mr Syed Jamaluddin</i>	Secretary General, FBCCI
<i>Mr J V Ketelson</i>	First Counselor Commission of the European Communities
<i>Mr M M Rezaul Karim</i>	Former Ambassador
<i>Mr Faisal Kamal</i>	Intern Centre for Policy Dialogue
<i>Ms Paula M Kazi</i>	Research Associate Centre for Policy Dialogue
<i>Mr Morshed Khan MP</i>	Former Special Envoy of the Prime Minister
<i>Ms Ria Khan</i>	Administrative Associate Centre for Policy Dialogue
<i>Ms Urmee Khan</i>	Intern Center for Policy Dialogue
<i>Mr Mabroor Mahmood</i>	Intern Centre for Policy Dialogue
<i>HE Mr Antonio de Souza Menezes</i>	Ambassador Commission of the European Communities
<i>Mr Mohammed Mohsin</i>	Former Ambassador and Foreign Secretary Government of Bangladesh
<i>Mr Mohammad Golam Mostafa</i>	Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters' Association
<i>Mr Jan Mass</i>	Counselor and Deputy Head of Mission Royal Netherlands Embassy
<i>Mr M R Osmany</i>	Former Foreign Secretary Government of Bangladesh
<i>Mr Biegit Pickel</i>	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation And Development, Germany

<i>Dr Abdul Quader</i>	Lecturer in Medicine Dhaka Dental College
<i>Mr M Saifur Rahman</i>	Member of Parliament and former Finance Minister Government of Bangladesh
<i>Professor Mustafizur Rahman</i>	Research Director Centre for Policy Dialogue
<i>Mr Saifur Rahman</i>	Research Associate Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka
<i>Mr Mahbub-Ur Rahman</i>	President International Chamber of Commerce, Bangladesh (ICC,B)
<i>Mr Narhari Rao</i>	Senior Economist Asian Development Bank (ADB)
<i>Mr M Mizanur Rahman</i>	Former Ambassador to Spain
<i>Mr Zillul Hye Razi</i>	Economic and Information Officer Commission of the European Communities
<i>Mr Waliur Rahman</i>	Former Ambassador and Director Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs
<i>HE Mr UWE Schramm</i>	Ambassador Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany
<i>Mr Quazi Hasnat Shahriar</i>	Research Associate Centre for Policy Dialogue
<i>Dr Hafiz G A Siddiqui</i>	Pro Vice Chancellor North South University
<i>Professor Rehmen Sobhan</i>	Chairman Centre for Policy Dialogue
<i>Mr Finn Thilsted</i>	Ambassador Royal Danish Embassy
<i>Mr Rashed M Titumir</i>	Research Fellow Centre for Policy Dialogue
<i>Mr Paul Walters</i>	Economic Advisor DFID, British High Commission
<i>Mr Jonas Wendel</i>	First Secretary Embassy of Sweden

Journalists

<i>Mr Faruque Ahmed</i>	Economic Reporter The Independent
<i>Mr Anis Alamgir</i>	Diplomatic Correspondent The Daily Ajker Kagoj
<i>Mr Zulfikar Ali</i>	Staff Reporter The Daily Mukta Kantha
<i>Mr Sunil Banerjee</i>	Senior Staff Reporter The Daily Janakantha
<i>Mr Rezaul Karim Byron</i>	Economic Reporter The Daily Sangbad
<i>Mr Delwar Hassan</i>	Staff Reporter Daily Dinkal
<i>Mr Mostafa Kamal</i>	Diplomatic Reporter The Prothom Alo
<i>Mr Shahriar Karim</i>	Reporter The Daily Star
<i>Mr Sultan Mahmud</i>	Banglar Bani
<i>Mr Talat Mamun</i>	Economic Reporter The Daily Arthaneeti
<i>Mr Julfikar Ali Manik</i>	Bhorer Kagoj
<i>Mr Shawkat Hossain Masum</i>	Economic Reporter The Daily Ittefaq
<i>Mr Waliur Rahman Miraj</i>	Local Correspondent BBC
<i>Ms Shahnaj Munni</i>	Reporter ETV
<i>Mr Iqbal Karim Nissan</i>	Manab Zamin