



Thirty Years of CPD
Sharing the Journey

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From the Executive Director's Desk

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) completed 30 years of its journey in 2023. Founded in 1993 by Professor Rehman Sobhan—an eminent economist renowned in South Asia and globally for his scholarly and professional contributions—CPD emerged as a pioneering think tank in Bangladesh and the region. Its inception coincided with a period of democratic resurgence in the country following a nine-year military regime. This pivotal moment created an opportunity for civil society think tanks to foster progressive ideas and contribute to debates on Bangladesh's development trajectory.

Dedicated to maintaining its independence and being responsive to social needs, CPD was established with the core mission of influencing the nation's policymaking processes and advocating for the rights and voices of marginalized communities. Over the past three decades, CPD has actively pursued its mission through undertaking research and generating knowledge, facilitating dialogues and outreach, and engaging in publication and dissemination efforts.

CPD's program activities have significantly expanded and evolved to address current and emerging issues during the last 30 years. CPD's flagship program, the Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD), has been providing analysis and recommendations on critical aspects of Bangladesh economy for three decades. Some of these



Dr Fahmida Khatun

Executive Director

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

issues include—analysis of the National Budget, domestic resource mobilization, financial sector, debt sustainability, external sector, employment generation and poverty eradication—all of which have a direct impact on the lives and well-being of the people of Bangladesh. Besides, CPD has worked on other pressing issues that have emerged over time, including inflationary pressures, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Rohingya crisis, devastating floods, power and energy and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

CPD has been pursuing programs and activities to promote economic cooperation in South Asia and to strengthen the global integration of low-income countries, such as Bangladesh. From very early on, CPD began to play an active role in promoting the interest of Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) in global platforms such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) through research and dissemination both in and outside Bangladesh. This global outreach has connected CPD with several Southern think tanks, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.

This volume narrates CPD's remarkable journey over three decades. It presents an account of CPD's establishment and growth by senior members of CPD. It also includes reflections of many collaborators of CPD—both from Bangladesh and across the globe—who share their experiences of engaging with the Centre over the decades. We gratefully acknowledge their thoughtful and encouraging contributions, which serve as both a tribute to our journey and an enduring source of inspiration for the path ahead.

CPD's strength lies in its collective effort. Every member of the CPD family contributed to making the 30-year journey so rewarding and impactful. Working with such bright minds and a devoted team is both a privilege and a source of pride. I express my profound gratitude to their unwavering commitment to realizing CPD's vision.

This volume is designed to present a narrative of the CPD journey over these 30 years. It presents a personalized history of the conception and evolution of CPD as a pioneering civil society organization set up by its founder and Chairman, Professor Rehman Sobhan. Two

further stories by Professor Rounaq Jahan, Distinguished Fellow, CPD and Professor Mustafizur Rahman, Distinguished Fellow and former Executive Director, CPD, continue the narrative, complemented by my own contribution.

A major part of this volume is contributed by CPD's fellow travelers along this 30-year journey, drawn both from within Bangladesh and from around the world, who have narrated their own experiences in their encounters with CPD over these years. CPD wishes to specially acknowledge and pay tribute to the generous and encouraging comments of its myriad friends which will continue to inspire us in the journey ahead.

As this publication was about to go to press, Bangladesh witnessed the July revolution led by the youth of Bangladesh through a mass mobilization which overthrew an autocratic regime headed by the Awami League in power for over 15 years. During the 36-day movement in July and August of 2024 significant state-led violence took place which led to more than 600 deaths and more than 1800 injured.

CPD, as an institution, and its members pay homage to those who sacrificed their lives in this movement. We hope that the political order which is expected to emerge out of this societal upheaval will create opportunities for CPD to play out its designated role as auditors of public action and continue to boldly articulate the concerns of the people of Bangladesh without fear of state repression in any form.

Dr Fahmida Khatun

Executive Director

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The CPD Journey

The Institutionalization of Public Reasoning

The CPD Journey

The Origins of CPD

The birth of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), as a civil society think tank, coincided with the renaissance of democratic rule after 15 years of Cantonment rule. It was then widely believed, both within political and civil society, that Civil Society Organizations (CSO) should play an active role in strengthening and deepening the workings of the democratic process. I had been engaged, from the outset of my working life in 1957 as a teacher at Dhaka University, in the struggle for a better governed, more just society. I believed that public reasoning was an essential instrument for constructing such a society and should be actively encouraged to sustain this renewal of the democratic process. I aspired to encourage public reasoning through establishing a facility which would promote discussion on issues of public concern, which could keep the prospective elected government accountable and also serve as a possible catalyst for influencing the direction of public policy. The dialogues should draw in stakeholders who would include participants from the government, parliament, the political opposition, the business community, civil society, trade unions, and other subaltern bodies.

I further believed that the proposed forum would enable us to engage with the international development community which had, in the past,



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tended to play a rather larger than life role in influencing the development policies of the government. We were keen to expose their various policy agendas to the influence of public reasoning through engagement with relevant Bangladeshi stakeholders.

An important motivation for creating space for policy dialogues was inspired by my experience as a Member of the Caretaker government (CTG), headed by Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed in 1990/91. During my tenure, I had invited 258 of some of the most creative and dedicated minds in Bangladesh to engage, through twenty-nine Task Forces (TF), in contributing policy suggestions to the incoming elected government. Much work and commitment had been invested by the professionals in preparing these twenty-nine Task Force reports, where they had volunteered their services. These reports were published in four thematic volumes covering (i) Policies for development (ii) Managing the development process (iii) Developing the infrastructure (iv) Environment policy. The TF reports had received scant attention by the then incoming BNP government. I felt it was important that this valuable work not be allowed to disappear from public memory. The CPD dialogue facility was intended to provide a fora for wider public exposure for the TF reports and promote fuller discussion of the issues raised in the reports.

Operationalizing CPD

CPD's original goals were modest. To operationalize the project, CPD needed a small office space for holding dialogues and a very small staff to handle the logistics of the operation. It was initially hoped to start the facility without going to any external donor for funding purposes by drawing upon the support of the leaders of a few highly respected and well-endowed NGOs. These included—Sir Fazle Hasan Abed of BRAC; Dr F. R. M. Hasan of GSS; Dr Qazi Faruque Ahmed of Proshika and Ms Khushi Kabir of Nijera Kori. These organizations, in those days, were actively committed to using policy advocacy to influence social reforms and could reach out to a broader constituency of civil society to deliver their messages. Each of the NGO leaders I approached committed to make available ten lakh taka to serve as seed capital with which to start the organization.

These initial sponsors constituted the core of CPD's Board of Trustees. They were subsequently joined by Mr M. Syeduzzaman, former Finance Minister; Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed, former Foreign Secretary; Mr Fakhruddin Ahmed, former Foreign Secretary and former Advisor, President's Advisory Council; Mr Syed Humayun Kabir, former President of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI); Professor Anisuzzaman, Dhaka University and Mr Nurul Huq, a former Member of the Planning Commission. Later Professor M Yunus of Grameen Bank joined what then appeared as an exceptionally distinguished Board of Trustees of CPD. In later years two former Presidents of MCCI, *Mr Syed Manzur Elahi* and Ms Laila Rahman Kabir also joined the CPD Board. In subsequent years the CPD Board included Advocate Sultana Kamal, Director of Ain-O-Salish Kendra (ASK); Ms Rasheda K. Choudhury, Chair of Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Ms Parveen Mahmud FCA, Former President, The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) and Director, DSE, Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam, Dhaka University, Barrister Shadheen Malik and Professor Rounaq Jahan, former Senior Research Scholar Columbia University and Distinguished Fellow, CPD.

I was elected by the initial sponsors to assume the position of Executive Chairman of CPD. I served in this position on an honorary basis for the next six years. Backed by a Board of high quality, with guaranteed but modest resources to underwrite our venture, at the end of 1993 CPD rented office space at 6 Eskaton Garden. This covered the ground floor of a two-storied building with a small compound which was helpful for parking cars. The then staff at CPD included Iftekhar Chowdhury as the Administrator, Shafiqul Islam as the head of Accounts, Iqbal Hossain as Secretary to the Chairman, Abdul Quddus, Computer Operator/Administrative Associate, Shoeb Siddique, Office Assistant and Abdus Salam, the driver of a small non-airconditioned sedan car.

Designing the dialogue format

CPD's initial mission was to convene monthly public dialogues, involving a limited number of participants, which could facilitate interactive discussion. The distinctive feature of the CPD dialogues owed to the careful preparation of the thematic issues intended for discussion which

could be circulated to the participants well in advance of the dialogue. This gave coherence to the dialogue and discouraged speakers from wandering all over the place, indulging in generalizations.

The CPD dialogues were premised on the need to bring together all stakeholders in a policy issue, spell out the key issues around which there was contestation and to seek resolution to conflictual issues by encouraging participants *to talk with each other* rather than *at each other*. The discussions were recorded. In order to expand outreach from the dialogues a good deal of publicity was given to the discussions through both the print and electronic media. The recorded dialogues were used to prepare a detailed report of the discussion which could then be published and widely circulated. In the first six years of CPD's existence, reports were prepared on 44 dialogues which were then assembled and published in two volumes. The first volume was titled, *Macroeconomic Issues, Governance and Regional Perspectives* which was published by Pathak Shamabesh in 2001. The second volume titled, *Energy and Transport Development; Industry, Export Promotion and Globalization; Agricultural Development; Population and Sustainable Development*, was published by Pathak Shamabesh in 2002. These two volumes provide a unique record of policy debates in Bangladesh in the years 1994-2000 and should serve as valuable source material for both historians and policy analysts.

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Initiating the dialogue process

The first CPD dialogue was convened towards the end of December 1993. It was conceived as a pilot project with no media presence and was held at a small conference room in BRAC. The dialogue was occasioned by a visit to Dhaka by Professor George Wardenburg from Rotterdam University, who was then serving as the

Chief Economic Advisor to Jan Pronk, the Dutch Minister for Foreign Aid. Since Jan Pronk, at that stage, was rethinking the Netherlands' aid policy, the discussion sought to contribute to this process by focusing on the political economy underlying foreign aid. This dialogue was attended by the Resident Representatives of the World Bank and the UNDP, economists from the World Bank, some senior Secretaries of the government and Sir Fazle Hasan Abed. The pilot dialogue demonstrated that constructive dialogues, devoid of rhetoric, held promise and received a positive response from the participants. This dialogue must have had some influence on Dutch rethinking as I was subsequently invited by Jan Pronk to a major conference convened in the Netherlands to discuss prospective reforms in their foreign aid policy.

CPD's first public dialogue was convened on February 10, 1994, at the Sonargaon Hotel, in one of its smaller rooms, to discuss *Policy Reform and the Acceleration of Investment Activity*. The participants included Mr Saifur Rahman, the Finance Minister, some former Finance Ministers, Members of Parliament (MP) from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Awami League (AL), senior business figures, senior secretaries of the government and some from among our development partners. A second, equally well attended dialogue, on the state of the economy, also involving Mr Saifur Rahman, was convened by CPD, some months later. The publicity which was given to the dialogues in the media suggested that the dialogue format was accepted as an important addition to the public and political landscape in Bangladesh.

At that time, little opportunity existed for constructive dialogue where contesting viewpoints, positions and people could be brought together. This was a period when the BNP had been elected to public office through a relatively free and fair election convened for the first time under a non-party Caretaker Government (CTG). The newly elected parliament had voted unanimously to amend the constitution to change the form of government from a presidential to a parliamentary system, with parliament serving as the focal point for political discussion and policymaking. Unfortunately, a regime of boycotts by the principal opposition party, the AL, initiated due to the exclusionary practices in parliament of the ruling party, had begun to undermine the role of the Parliament as the principal arena for political debate. As a consequence,

many issues of importance, particularly relating to the economy, were not being adequately discussed in parliament. In those early years of 1994-95, with parliament exposed to opposition boycotts, the CPD dialogues became the most recognized focal point for constructive debate on policy issues of the time.

The dialogues, facilitated by the CPD format, ensured that the discussions were rarely acrimonious, projected sobriety and encouraged the quest for consensus. The CPD dialogues, within a short time, established that even at times of open political confrontation our public figures could, under appropriate conditions, project themselves as reasonable human beings rather than pathological antagonists. This provided some evidence that the resort to public reasoning did have a potential role to play even in those divisive moments in our public life.

In the light of the positive experiences registered from CPD's first two public dialogues, the third dialogue, again convened at the Sonargaon Hotel on June 11, 1994 was organized on a rather grander scale, in cooperation with the World Bank, to discuss their recently published Country Economic Memorandum (CEM) on the theme of *Moving the Bangladesh Economy from Stabilization to Growth: An Agenda for 1994-95*. The dialogues provided the first occasion where the World Bank agreed to expose the CEM to public discussion. Our objective in this exercise was to not just evaluate the policy direction of the government but to hold the World Bank accountable for their policies, advocated through the annual CEM. The dialogue paved the way for CPD to initiate the preparation of its annual *Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development* (IRBD), which was designed to introduce a Bangladeshi perspective into the national policy discourse.

Given the public significance of such a dialogue, it was convened over a full day, structured over three sessions to discuss sequentially: (i) the Macroeconomy (ii) the Financial Sector and (iii) Private Sector Development. The first two sessions were attended once again by the Finance Minister Saifur Rahman, three BNP MPs, Mr Tofail Ahmed, a future AL Minister and MP, Professor Nurul Islam, then on a visit to Dhaka, SAMS Kibria, a leading figure on the AL Advisory Council, Mr M. Syeduzzaman and Mr A.M.A. Muhith, both ex-Finance Ministers,

Professor M. Yunus, MD of the Grameen Bank, six senior secretaries, senior businessmen, economists and the top brass of the World Bank.

CPD had structured the agenda so as to stimulate debate on diagnosis and policy recommendations posed by the CEM. Themes covered in the dialogue included the need for political consensus in economic policymaking, the quantity and quality of public investment, prioritization of poverty alleviation, commitment and action needed on governance issues to bring down capital costs, lack of depth and breadth in the state mandated privatization process, competitiveness and wage structure of the labor market. These three dialogues were given front page coverage in the print media and provided lead stories on the TV channels.

Upscaling CPD

The governance program

What became the game changer for CPD was the move to take on policy-oriented research projects which eventually became quite ambitious in their scope. The first of these was the governance project. Over the 1980s, some of the more progressive economists had been engaged in a debate with the World Bank (WB) on the relevance and utility of the structural adjustment reforms they were imposing on Bangladesh through the use of aid conditionality. It had been argued that the WB's reform agenda had ignored the importance of the governance variable in determining policy outcomes. Unless the dynamics and quality of the governance process were adequately addressed in the design of policy reforms such reforms may not be particularly effective. It was argued that the so-called success stories of East Asia, originated in their better quality of governance rather than their adherence to a stereotyped version of structural reforms. I had been actively engaged in these debates during my tenure as DG, BIDS in the 1980s and continued to raise the issue of governance during the early CPD dialogues.

During 1994, CPD took on its first major research project on the role of governance in the development process. A dedicated research team was recruited to work with me as CPD's Chairman on the project.

The team included Mirza Hassan, Meghna Guhathakurta, Syed M. Hashemi, M.M. Akash, Shahnaz Karim and Bina D' Costa. The research group-initiated work on preparing a number of papers on governance which then provided the basis for CPD hosting a major international conference in mid-1996 on *Learning from East Asia, Lessons for South Asia*, which was intended to test the hypothesis that one of the principal factors in explaining the superior development performance of East over South Asia was to be found in the quality of governance rather than the neoliberal policy agendas attributed by the World Bank.

CPD's East Asia conference turned out to be an exceptionally high caliber academic event and was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The CPD conference served as Sheikh Hasina's first public appearance after she took over as Prime Minister, after a gap of twenty-one years spent in the wilderness by her newly inducted AL regime. CPD brought in governance specialists and economists from around the world such as Professors Nurul Islam, Robert Wade from LSE, Justin Yufu Lin from China, K.S. Jomo from Malaysia, Hajoong Chang from Cambridge University among other scholars. Experts from the World Bank, ADB, UNDP senior policymakers from South Asia such as Sartaj Aziz, a former Finance Minister of Pakistan, incumbent and former ministers from Bangladesh, attended the event.

The IRBD Challenge

The birth of the IRBD

While the governance program sharply escalated CPD's work load its program could still be manageable within the administrative resources and logistical facilities available at its small Eskaton Garden office. What completely changed the face of CPD and the type of organization it was intended to be was the move to prepare an annual report which provided an independent perspective from civil society on the state of the Bangladesh economy. Most of the reporting and analyses on the state of the economy had, for the previous twenty years, been undertaken by the WB which then brought out a CEM, popularly known as the grey cover report, reviewing the economy of Bangladesh. It was a document prepared largely from the perspective of the WB, reviewing the economy

and state of reforms or lack of it as interpreted within the report. The report was presented as the document of choice for the annual Bangladesh aid consortium meeting convened in Paris every April.

In CPD it was believed that WB/IMF reforms did not always provide the best solutions for what Bangladesh required. We had argued that the prevailing WB and IMF approach to policy reforms was limited in its perspective because it concentrated exclusively on economic issues. Their reform agenda largely ignored governance issues originating in the underlying political economy which conditioned both the design and implementation of policies. Nor did the CEM give sufficient attention to issues of poverty alleviation and growing inequality. We were, therefore, keen to use CPD's report to broaden the conceptual focus for policy debate and to thereby challenge the prevailing hegemony of our aid donors over the policy discourse. The governance project underway at CPD had already initiated such a challenge. IRBD was thus intended to provide a holistic approach to fashioning a more relevant policy response.

CPD aspired to draw upon the thinking of a then small group of heterodox economists globally challenging both the theories underlying neoclassical economics and the empirical research originating from the World Bank, based on these theories. This group also drew attention to the need to introduce issues of governance into the policy discussion.

Preparing the first IRBD

When we took on the task at CPD it had no professional resources at its disposal to take up such a challenge. I reached out to Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) at that time and persuaded Debapriya Bhattacharya (DB), who was then a Senior Research Fellow at BIDS, to come and help me with such an ambitious project. Debapriya, in turn, brought in *Professor Mustafizur Rahman* (MR), who was then a Professor of Economics in the Commerce Faculty at Dhaka University (DU), to provide me with substantive core support by heading the secretariat for preparing what came to be known as the Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD).

In seeking funding for the project I approached a group of those whom we then termed the likeminded donors, to support the project. We categorized as 'likeminded' donors those countries or development institutions who were at that time not influential enough to impose their preferred policy advise on the country. The likeminded donors gave a sizeable amount of aid to Bangladesh but were more inclined to take cognizance of the perspectives of Bangladeshis as to policies appropriate for their country. The initial group I reached out to included the UK, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands and Canada. This consortium signed on to provide sufficient resources for CPD to bring out an annual independent review of the Bangladesh economy for several years.

CPD's heroic labors, undertaken with limited resources, culminated in the first of what came to be known as the Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development, the IRBD as it was publicly recognized. The first report was completed in mid-May 1995 and was presented in a series of dialogues to coincide with the presentation of the national budget so it could have some impact on economic policymaking.

Preparing, a report which was of a comparative standard to the World Bank's CEM on the economy, was a major challenge. The World Bank had, at its disposal, the entire staff of the South Asia division in the Bank as well as the local Bank office staff plus consultants they hired to specifically help them in this task. In CPD's case, I reached out mostly to our former colleagues at BIDS and some distinguished economists such as Muzaffar Ahmed and Wahiduddin Mahmud to take on the responsibility for preparing various chapters of the IRBD covering different segments of the economy. To reach out to people who were not within CPD's disciplinary control and who were themselves working for other organizations was a severely demanding, labor-intensive exercise in both entrepreneurship and exploitation of personal influence by me. Once I took on the major editorial responsibility for publishing the report, I was greatly helped by MR who put in long hours to help me by both contributing a chapter on trade and in the editorial work for the entire volume. Fortunately, CPD could now also afford to employ some research associates to work with us on the project and were able to bring in some of the best young talents recently

graduated from the Economics department at Dhaka University such as Abdur Razzaq, Anisur Rahman, Selim Raihan and Nazneen Ahmed.

The launch of the IRBD

CPD's heroic labors, undertaken with limited resources, culminated in the first of what came to be known as the *Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development*, the IRBD as it was publicly recognized. The first report was completed in mid-May 1995 and was presented in a series of dialogues to coincide with the presentation of the national budget so it could have some impact on economic policymaking.

The first dialogue to discuss the IRBD was an historic event which went on over three days. It was inaugurated by the Finance Minister Saifur Rahman. In various sessions, different Cabinet Ministers of the BNP regime attended. In counterpoise to them, I brought in senior leaders in each session from the AL, such as SAMS Kibria, who was their prospective shadow Finance Minister, Matia Chowdhury, prospective shadow Agriculture Minister, Mr Tofail Ahmed and a number of others plus a wide cross section of business, civil society and academics to participate in the three-day dialogue. The World Bank local office and South Asia Division from headquarters were also well represented and possibility impressed that Bangladeshis were capable of preparing a report of comparable standard to the CEM. The budget dialogue provided space for civilized professional discussion relatively free of polemics. It received wide media coverage and was much talked about around the country, including in parliament as well as within the local development community. The likeminded donors who underwrote the IRBD appeared to be satisfied with CPD's quality of work and possibly encouraged that they did not need to exclusively depend on the World Bank to educate themselves on the state of the Bangladesh economy.

The IRBD was quite critical of some of the government policies and actions which aroused a degree of resentment in BNP circles. Saifur Rahman, who had been attending CPD dialogues from our earliest days in 1994, had his own misgivings about our critiques of some of his policies but he eventually accepted the IRBD in good spirit.

The IRBD evolved into the flagship project for CPD and has been published without interruption over the next 28 years. The IRBD dialogue coincided with the publication of the government's annual budget. The IRBD served to provide an opportunity for civil society to intensively discuss the budget and economic policies of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) drawing on the documentation provided by the IRBD. The discussion of the IRBD in the wake of the presentation of the annual budget has, since 1995, become institutionalized in the public calendar as an annual CPD convened event. The IRBD preparation was progressively devolved on DB and MR who eventually joined CPD on a full-time basis. They could then hire a much larger number of professional staff to work on the preparation of the IRBD itself.

Over the years, the design of the IRBD changed. In the early years, during the 1990s, it mostly depended on outside expertise, drawn largely from BIDS, to prepare specific thematic chapters in their particular areas of expertise. Initially a different thematic focus was provided for successive IRBDs, covering various key topics such as governance and policy reforms. In later years dependence on outside expertise became progressively more difficult. CPD then moved to prepare the IRBD through an increasingly inhouse effort. This required hiring more professional staff and assuming greater institutional responsibility for the task. Today the IRBD is exclusively prepared in-house with its focus on the macroeconomy and is published every six months. It is still regarded as the standard reference on the economy. Its publication and the CPD's annual dialogue, in the aftermath of the budget, on the state of the economy are, to this day, recognized as landmark public events.

Professor Amartya Sen, attended a number of CPD events, addressing a range of specialized dialogues at the national and regional level. On 14 March 1999, CPD hosted Professor Joseph Stiglitz, then Chief Economist and Vice President of the World Bank, later a Nobel Laureate, to discuss his presentation on *Policy Reform: the Need for a New Consensus*.

The CPD dialogue programs

Whilst the IRBD and the governance project served as flagship projects for CPD its monthly policy dialogues provided it with a high degree of visibility throughout the year. CPD dialogues touched a variety of topical themes. The broad thematic coverage ranged from macroeconomic management and policy reforms, foreign aid related issues, governance, regional issues, energy, transport, industries, export development and globalization, agriculture, population and vocational development.

CPD also managed to reach out to some internationally eminent economists who were known for their willingness to challenge the conventional wisdom of the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWI) and involve them in its dialogues. Professor Amartya Sen, attended a number of CPD events, addressing a range of specialized dialogues at the national and regional level. On 14 March 1999, CPD hosted Professor Joseph Stiglitz, then Chief Economist and Vice President of the World Bank, later a Nobel Laureate, to discuss his presentation on *Policy Reform: The Need for a New Consensus*. In the dialogue he could engage with the Bangladesh Planning Minister, ex-finance ministers, senior secretaries, leading economists, business and civil society leaders such as Dr. Mohammed Yunus. Next year on 5th January 2000, CPD hosted Professor Jeffery Sachs to make a presentation on *New Strategies for International Assistance*. Sachs was also exposed to a cross section of senior politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen and economists. His provocative but innovative thoughts initiated a lively debate. Over the years other distinguished experts were invited to address or participate in particular CPD dialogues.

CPD did not merely draw on the IRBD to challenge the thinking of the World Bank on policy issues. When the Bank brought out an international publication on privatization policy titled *Bureaucrats in Business*, authored by a Division Chief, Mary Shirley, I invited her to come to Dhaka and present the report before a national audience of top policymakers. We invited K.S. Jomo to fly into Dhaka to talk about the Malaysian experience with privatization.

CPD hosted a two-day dialogue on privatization, at the Sheraton hotel, based on the World Bank report, which was attended by the then Finance Minister SAMS Kibria, along with the representatives from various industries and other ministers. I requested M.M. Akash, from the Economics Department at Dhaka University to prepare a detailed comment on the WB report. His paper pointed out a number of flaws in the WB report and the inappropriate nature of the conclusions drawn from the findings in order to validate the Bank's privatization agenda. Akash's report and some related research at CPD has been presented in a volume, *Privatization in Bangladesh: An agenda in search of a policy*, published by the University Press Limited in 2005.

CPD also collaborated with some other international institutions to organize a number of international and regional dialogues. In November 1996 CPD partnered with UNRISD from Geneva to host an international dialogue on the theme, *Towards a More Gender Equitable Development Agenda*. The dialogue hosted 28 foreign participants in a widely attended event convened in the rural surroundings of Rajendrapur. The event was inaugurated by the Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury. All the foreign participants were eventually invited to meet the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who demonstrated a keen interest on gender related issues.

CPD put strong emphasis on promoting regional cooperation through collaboration with regional institutions. Regional dialogues were convened with Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi to discuss the *Future of SAARC*, with ESCAP to discuss Growth Zones in South and East Asia, with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) on *Payment and Monetary Cooperation in South Asia*. Dialogues on the *Trans Asians Railway Network and on the Southern Corridor Infrastructure for Integrating Asia's Land Transport System*, were organized in partnership with the Transport Division of UNESCAP.

The Establishment of a CPD Identity

Building relations with the media

CPD dialogues invariably brought in incumbent ministers, whether from the BNP or the AL, as well as leaders from the opposition of the day, development partners, business circles, academics and others. They were widely publicized in the media. For a relatively small and new organization, CPD acquired high visibility as well as notoriety but this did not discourage ministers from either of the two regimes from engaging with us. Even when they disagreed with the arguments in some of the dialogues they found it unwise to miss out on attending our dialogues. Only rarely did a dialogue incite political polemics or become overtly confrontational. This validated our assumption in setting up CPD that if we could bring political figures together within our dialogues, who were vilifying each other in public, they would be persuaded to discuss contentious issues reasonably and even reach a consensus on some issues.

The IRBD, the Indo-Bangladesh dialogues, CPD's South Asian initiatives and a number of other international and national programs that we had organized, transformed CPD, within its first five years, into a major presence on the civil society landscape of Bangladesh. CPD dialogues have since become public events. We built up excellent relations with the media who gave us wide exposure. It was quite common for any CPD dialogue to emerge as a lead story in the media, including in sections of the electronic media.

In the process of organizing its policy dialogues CPD developed strategic partnerships with the print and electronic media. CPD viewed the media as an important conduit in providing outreach to its policy agendas by disseminating its research and dialogue outputs before a

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national audience. The media has thus helped CPD and other such CSOs in building public awareness on various policy issues, in policy advocacy, and in promoting informed policy debate among stakeholders.

As part of its outreach process CPD began to hold regular press briefings to comment on topical issues, launch global reports of interest to Bangladeshi audiences and prepare press releases on events organized by the Centre. CPD professionals were, in turn, invited by the print and electronic media to provide comments through interviews and by preparing short write-ups and op-ed editorials. Senior CPD staff were invited to provide interviews to the international media and regularly participate in talk shows in the domestic media to the extent that a number of them established themselves as widely recognizable public personalities.

Here it must be mentioned that the media in Bangladesh is quite exceptional compared to our neighboring countries or indeed most countries across the world in the coverage it gives to civil society dialogues, research findings and even the opinions of some of its better known academic and civil society personalities. This has served as a strong encouragement to CPD to know that its work was being given public recognition. CPD's experience with the media incentivized the emergence of other CSOs over the years. Today with a much larger cohort of CSOs engaged in discussing public issues, the projection of civil society opinion by the media often competes with the voice of the political opposition which had, particularly during the recent periods of autocratic rule, faced a progressive suppression in its audibility.

That CPD's views were given so much attention was rather flattering to our self-esteem. In our early years we did not expect that much publicity because our research capabilities at that early stage were still being built up. Because of the high profile of the participants in CPD's dialogues, we could attract a great deal of attention. Virtually every dialogue had as its chief guest a sitting minister and as a special guest a senior figure from the opposition party. This became the standard format. Since parts of the discussion in these dialogues were critical of what was going on in government policymaking this aroused some discontent with CPD within the incumbent government, particularly amongst some ministers.

To our advantage CPD's comments on public policy also provided valuable newsworthy stories for journalists who were regularly invited to cover our dialogues. In spite of such points of contestation throughout the tenure of the two BNP and four AL regimes, which continued through 1994-2024, CPD could maintain a positive relationship with successive regimes without any breakdown in communications with them.

In the most recent phase of the AL rule which became increasingly intolerant of dissent CPD's capacity of speaking truth to power became more risk-prone. Over these years CPD was exposed to public criticism by the Prime Minister, particular cabinet ministers and ruling party MPs who took objection to what they deemed to be our critical comments on public policy and governance. Significantly such official voices were rarely willing to engage in public reasoning with CPD to challenge our position but preferred to resort to rhetorical abuse.

Institution Building

Regime change at CPD

By 1999 CPD was five years old, with an established organization. In order to enhance the management capacity of this expanded organization I had invited Nurul Huq, a former Member of Bangladesh Planning Commission and Jamil Chowdhury, the founder-Director of East Pakistan Television (PTV) and later Bangladesh Television (BTV), to join CPD. Later Ataus Samad, a senior journalist, joined CPD for a brief period to strengthen its relations with the media. By mid-1999 I felt the time had come for me to step down as the Chief Executive. It has been my life-long policy never to hang on to executive leadership for too long lest it discourages the next generation of people of quality who may be aspiring to lead an organization. On my relinquishment

By 1999 CPD was five years old, with an established organization. In order to enhance the management capacity of this expanded organization CPD had invited Nurul Huq, a former Member of Bangladesh Planning Commission and Jamil Chowdhury, the founder-Director of East Pakistan and later Bangladesh Television to join CPD. Later Ataus Samad, a senior journalist, joined CPD for a brief period to strengthen its relations with the media

of executive responsibilities, I continued to remain engaged with CPD as its Chairman of the Board, a position I occupy to this day.

Drawing on my experience in BIDS and later through association at CPD, I decided to invite Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya (DB) to take over as the Executive Director (ED) of CPD. DB was then a full-time staff member, serving as a Senior Fellow at BIDS. It was a big risk for him to move to an as yet fledgling organization such as CPD, a non-governmental entity with a lifespan of just 5 years, but he courageously accepted the challenge to take over as ED of CPD assuming charge in May 1999. MR, who was already heavily engaged in preparing the IRBD also agreed to invest most of his professional time at CPD and agreed to serve as Research Director (RD). With the full time presence of DB and MR at CPD they could also take over the substantive administration of the organization from Nurul Huq and Jamil Chowdhury who had performed sterling service in this transitional phase in the life of CPD.

In the early years when we had established CPD in a small apartment at Eskaton Gardens, the venture had been little more than an idea, with modest ambitions about its future. Within a period of five years CPD had evolved into a frontline civil society institution committed to working on two ongoing research projects on the themes of governance and the preparation of the IRBD. To accommodate such an enhanced program, CPD's premises had expanded from a single four room apartment in Eskaton Gardens to three such premises on the same road, to accommodate a research team of over 40 people. A growing number of well-known and younger researchers were working on research projects at CPD or to provide administrative back up.

Once DB took over responsibilities as ED, it was decided to bring these dispersed CPD offices together in a single four storied rented building located at 40/C, Road No. 11 (New), Dhanmondi. CPD moved into this facility in September 2000. This building is now fully owned by CPD and has been rebuilt as a more modern, research friendly, facility.

Once CPD occupied a building of its own, with a growing research and administrative staff and two senior persons working full time to oversee the venture, the organization needed to grow beyond its largely

improvised institutional format into a regular institution with its own clearly articulated organizational structure and more regular sources of funding. At the end of five years, whilst CPD was still located at Eskaton Garden, we had commissioned an institutional review of CPD in order to evaluate what we had achieved and set guidelines for the evolution of the organization. We established an exceptionally high-powered review committee headed by former Chief Justice Kamaluddin Hossain, with former Cabinet Secretary Mujibul Haq and Dr. Rushedan Islam Rahman, Research Director at BIDS, as members. The very positive and constructive report of this committee was most helpful in advising us to institutionalize the organization, widen our outreach and generate resources for our programs.

The positive report of the review committee and relocation to our own premises in Dhanmondi, encouraged DB and MR to work indefatigably to institutionalize CPD, expand its programs, recruit staff on a permanent rather than programmatic basis and project CPD's persona before the citizens of Bangladesh as a recognizable civil society institution. DB served CPD as its ED from 1999 to 2007 and then continued to serve the organization as a Distinguished Fellow (DF). MR succeeded DB as the ED in 2007 and served up to 2017 when he decided to serve as a DF. In this capacity both DB and MR have continued to lead some of CPD's research projects. MR was succeeded by Fahmida Khatun (FK) who is the current ED of CPD. The rapid growth and visibility of the CPD over the next two decades is a tribute to the endeavors of the successive CPD leadership and the entire staff of the organization. MR, in a later contribution to this volume, has provided a more substantive account of the further growth, institutionalization and transformation of CPD under the leadership of DB as ED and continued by him and FK who succeeded him as chief executives.

The smooth succession over 30 years at CPD from me to Debapriya to Mustafiz and now with Fahmida, assuming executive leadership is rather unique for Bangladesh. The tradition of founding or dynastic leaders in both NGOs as well as political parties perpetuating themselves or their families has become well established and impacts on the smoothness of the transition and sustainability of many such organizations. CPD's ability to institutionalize its leadership succession process remains one of

its more singular achievements and has contributed to its sustainability as an institution.

The Growth and Diversification of CPD

The transition of CPD from its temporary accommodation in Eskaton Garden to a more permanent base in Dhanmondi moved concurrently with the further institutionalization of the organization through providing longer term, more secure employment opportunities for its staff guided by a set of Service Rules to underwrite a rules-based system of governance. With a much enhanced research capacity CPD could increasingly deploy its human resources to make its dialogues more evidence based. As a result, CPD's publications originating from its research and dialogue programs greatly increased. Its publications have been widely drawn upon as a reference source by policymakers, international and academic institutions, the media and the public. Students have found the CPD's publications particularly helpful in educating themselves on the state of the economy. These reports, involving substantive research, are presented in a readable format so it can be made accessible to the widest possible audience. This has ensured that CPD's IRBD and other reports are one of the most regularly cited source materials in the media and other academic publications.

While the publication of the IRBD reports have become identified with CPD as standard reference documents on the Bangladesh economy we have greatly widened the compass of the organization's research beyond the IRBD. Most of the dialogue programs are based on a diversified research agenda. The widening range of CPD's work has moved on to include such issues as challenging the injustice of poverty, agricultural diversification, industrialization and trade policy, the future of the RMG sector, the implications of Bangladesh's LDC graduation, energy, climate change, green transition, women's empowerment policy, political and economic governance, the role of parliament and the state of the political parties, and the SDGs among other topics.

The Emergence of Civil Society

The growth of civil society activism

Civil society has existed as long and possibly even before the emergence of organized politics. However, in the Bangladesh context, in the Cantonment years, civil society activism was largely driven by more issue specific mobilizations originating from concerned or affected professional groups or in relation to single issues inspiring the commitment of particular groups affected by these issues or seeking to mobilize public support behind their particular agenda. Such CSOs became active prior to the presentation of the national budget to demand special attention by the government to the interests of various segments of the business community or professional interests. Throughout the year various trade unions or professional organizations would mobilize to address the concerns of workers, nurses, school teachers and myriad other groups. For example, over the years the trade union movement has campaigned for raising the minimum age and improving working conditions in the Readymade Garment (RMG) sector amongst other issues.

During the 1990s some of the most significant issue specific mobilizations from civil society had been initiated around issues such as the *Ghatak-Dalal Nirmul Committee* (Committee for Eradicating the Killers and Collaborators of '71), seeking to mobilize political support for the trial of war crimes collaborators of the Pakistani army in 1971. Another such group, under the banner of a *Tel-Gas Khanija Sampad O Biddut Bandar Roksa Jatiya Kamiti* (National Committee to Protect Oil-Gas-Mineral Resources-Power and Ports) had played a significant role in mobilizing the public, political and civil society to frustrate the mining of coal in Northern Bangladesh by a multinational company.

CPD, emerging at the end of 1993, was perhaps one of the first CSOs, which attempted to build an institution focused on bringing together a broader spectrum of citizens to address a range of public concerns from the state of the economy, to the quality of governance and the state of democracy. Organizations such as CPD, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), could benefit from the changing perspective of developmental institutions,

whether governmental or of private foundations, towards development and governance. The challenges from heterodox economists, dissenting academics and international CSOs such as OXFAM, to the unjust outcomes of the Washington Consensus based reforms had redirected the attention of the development agencies to issues of governance, poverty, human development and the importance of CSOs among others in promoting better governance. These agencies were more willing to now underwrite CSOs willing to promote better, more just and accountable, governance. CPD was a beneficiary of this process. Its emergence, growth and visibility was encouraged but did not originate from the support of likeminded organizations.

The emergence of a more wholistically focused CSO such as CPD did not preclude its engagement with more issue specific movements such as the struggle by RMG workers for improved wages and working conditions. Over the years CPD has provided research inputs to service the campaigns of the trade unions for improved minimum wages and hosted dialogues to empower the workers to argue their case with the powerful employer's bodies such as the BGMEA.

Civil society initiative at political mediation

During its early period CPD, towards end of 1995, drew upon its growing recognition as voice in civil society in playing an important role in mediating political conflict between the then incumbent BNP regime and the opposition AL led alliance. CPD was instrumental in convening an alliance of leaders from civil society organizations such as Grameen Bank, BRAC, FBCCI, MCCI amongst others, to address the growing confrontation between the then BNP led government and the AL over the issue of establishing a caretaker government (CTG) to preside over the parliamentary elections scheduled for February 1996. I was a member of a five member group of so called 'eminent persons', publicly known as the G-5 which was elected by the assembly of civil society leaders to mediate between the PM Begum Khaleda Zia and the then opposition leader, Sheikh Hasina to reconcile their conflicting positions over the CTG issue. CPD served as the secretariat for this civil society initiative. The G-5's well intentioned efforts, through five rounds of negotiations with the two leader, did not bear fruit but did represent a

public initiative by civil society to address the increasingly antagonistic and confrontational nature of the democratic process.

CPD's revival of the Task Forces

CPD always recognized that to improve the effectiveness of its policy advocacy it needed to draw in a wider community of CSOs and to expand its outreach beyond the seminar rooms of Dhaka. The move to broaden its outreach was stimulated by the imminence of fresh elections for the parliament in 2001. Around that time CPD decided that it would bring together experts from around the country to set up a series of task forces. Drawing on my experience in setting up 29 Task Forces during my tenure on the first CTG in 1991 it was decided by CPD to set up 16 TFs to prepare policy briefs to provide recommendations to address some of the critical problems likely to confront the newly elected regime expected to assume office in 2001.

We advised the prospective TF members that the tasks we were setting for them should not be too ambitious. Their recommendations could be much more synoptic, mainly in point format. The idea would be to use the taskforce reports to initiate a public debate on what needed to be done.

We eventually did get together an excellent team. 160 professionals, including many from the original 1991 Task Forces, contributed to the various policy briefs. The list of briefs prepared by the TFs is presented in Annex-C. CPD presented these briefs at a series of dialogues convened on the eve of the 2001 election, before a large audience of political and civil society. We invited the then President, Shahabuddin Ahmed as the Chief Guest, along with the Secretary Generals of the two parties, Mannan Bhuiyan of the BNP and Abdul Jalil of the AL who attended as Special Guests.

The dialogues on the TF policy briefs received extensive publicity and aroused some expectation that the contending political parties may make some use of the policy recommendations of the TF. Unfortunately, as in 1991, the BNP regime elected to office in 2001 made little use of the TF reports.

In 2003 CPD once again convened 17 Task Forces to review the extent to which the recommendations of the TFs set up in 2001 as well as the implementation of BNP's own policy manifesto had been implemented by the incumbent BNP government. The reports of the TFs indicated that little had been done in these areas.

A Vision for 2021

The quest for clean politics

The melancholy outcome of the experience with the TF reports of 2001 and 2003 had been compounded by the deterioration in the political environment during the tenure of the second BNP led regime under Khaleda Zia from 2001-2006. This period had witnessed the emergence of an increasingly confrontational political environment with a tendency to use violence as a means of intimidating political opponents which had severely narrowed the space for public reasoning. Such a deteriorating political environment had been further vitiated by the influence of money and muscle power which had emerged as a growing influence on the type of candidates being selected by the political parties for contestation as MPs.

In this increasingly contentious environment between the ruling BNP and the opposition AL CPD believed that the forthcoming elections scheduled for January 2007 may be compromised. We were anxious that the tradition of free and fair elections be sustained. It was also argued by CPD and other civil society organizations that a more credible set of candidates with clean records and stronger motivation to be of service to the people needed to be elected to parliament.

The issue of improving the quality of governance and strengthening the democratic process had been under discussion in CPD and other civil society convened dialogues during both the AL and BNP regime. Faced with a deteriorating political environment it was felt that civil society organizations should come together more pro-actively to improve the credibility of the electoral process which was already under challenge over the question of the prospective candidate who would serve as the Chief Advisor of the CTG to oversee the 2007 election.

CPD believed that any attempt by civil society to influence the quality of the electoral process required greater collaboration amongst concerned CSOs. In a number of inhouse dialogues convened by CPD at the beginning of 2006 a group of CSOs came together to discuss the forthcoming elections of January 2007. The group resolved that civil society should take some initiatives in spelling out the concerns and expectations of citizens from the prospective 2007 election. It was argued that CS should attempt to encourage the political parties to move away from the largely dysfunctional and illiberal direction of politics which had become increasingly visible. It was decided that CPD should take the initiative in assembling a gathering of prominent personalities from civil society to seek further guidance on what needed to be done to improve the quality of governance and the working of the democratic process.

Origins of the Nagorik Committee

CPD convened a largely attended public event at the Sheraton hotel in March 2006. The speakers on the platform, which was chaired by me, included former Chief Justice Habibur Rahman who had headed the CTG of 1996 and Professor Yunus. The meeting was attended by leading politicians from the government and opposition as well as by a broad cross section of civil society.

During the discussions both politicians and civil society leaders spoke in support of bringing together a group of eminent citizens to prepare a vision document which could influence the policy agendas of political parties contesting the forthcoming elections. A good deal of the discussion was focused on the worrisome nature of the current political situation which needed correction so that a credible, free and fair election, where money and muscle would not be deployed, was identified as an issue of urgent concern.

At that meeting Professor Muhammad Yunus strongly spoke out on the importance of encouraging clean candidates to come forward and contest elections. He even advocated that some such candidates should be sponsored by civil society to contest the election as independent candidates.

As an end product of the Dhaka conclave a *Nagorik Committee* (citizen's committee) was constituted to draft a vision statement for 2021 to be presented to the principal parties contesting the elections to inspire them to incorporate these ideas in their election manifesto. CPD was designated as its secretariat. The Committee included an exceptionally distinguished body of citizens who commanded both wide recognition and public respect. The Committee's members are listed in Box-1.

<p>Convenor</p> <p><i>Rehman Sobhan</i>, Chairman, CPD</p>
<p>Co-convenor</p> <p><i>Laila Rahamn Kabir</i>, Member CPD's Board of Trustees and former President, Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI).</p> <p><i>Abdullah Abu Sayeed</i>, President, Bishwa Shahitya Kendra</p> <p><i>M. Syeduzzaman</i>, Former Minister for Finance and Chairman, Bank Asia</p>
<p>Members</p> <p><i>Fazle Hasan Abed</i>, Chairperson, BRAC</p> <p><i>Abul Ahsan</i>, Former Foreign Secretary and Former Secretary General, SAARC</p> <p><i>Anisuzzaman</i>, Professor, Department of Bangla, University of Dhaka</p> <p><i>Samson H Chowdhury</i>, Chairman, Square Group</p> <p><i>Maj Gen (Rtd) Moinul Hossain Chowdhury</i>, BB, Former Advisor to the Caretaker Government</p> <p><i>Jamulur Reza Chowdhury</i>, Former Advisor to the Caretaker Government and Vice Chancellor, BRAC University</p> <p><i>Syed Manzur Elahi</i>, Former Advisor to the Caretaker Government and Chairman, APEX Tannery</p> <p><i>Angela Gomes</i>, Executive Director, Banchte Sekha</p> <p><i>Hasan Azizul Haq</i>, Former Professor of Philosophy, Rajshahi University</p> <p><i>M Mujibul Huq</i>, Former Cabinet Secretary, Government of Bangladesh</p>

(Box 1 contd.)

(Box 1 contd.)

Mohammad Zafar Iqbal, Chairman, Department of Electronics and Computer Science, Shajalal Science and Technology University

Mahmuda Islam, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Dhaka and President, Women for Women

Jamal Nazrul Islam, Professor Emeritus, Research Centre for Mathematics and Physical Science, University of Chittagong

Sultana Kamal, Executive Director, Ain-O-Shalish Kendra

M Hafizuddin Khan, Former Advisor to the Caretaker Government and Former Comptroller and Auditor General

Iqbal Mahmud, Former Vice Chancellor and Professor, Department of Chemical Engineering BUET

Wahiduddin Mahmud, Former Advisor to the Caretaker Government and Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka

Latifur Rahman, President, Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) and Managing Director, Transcom Group

Raja Devasish Roy, Chakma Chief and Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

A S M Shahjahan, Former Advisor to the Caretaker Government and Former Inspector General of Police

Muhammad Yunus, Managing Director, Grameen Bank Ltd.

Member Secretary

Debapriya Bhattacharya, Executive Director, CPD

A political education from citizens

To ensure both wider reach and public visibility for the work of the *Nagorik Committee*, CPD established a partnership with the *Daily Star* and the *Prothom Alo* two leading newspapers of Bangladesh. It was decided to open up a consultation process in some of the major district capitals with a broader segment of civil society. We initiated a series of consultative dialogues in various district capitals around the country ranging from Chittagong to Sylhet, Rajshahi, Pabna and Khulna. In each of these conclave members of the *Nagorik Committee* participated. Our

goal was to seek inputs from a cross section of citizens to gauge the dominant concerns of people around the country which could guide the *Nagorik Committee* in designing its futuristic agenda for Bangladesh. We expected to obtain some guidance from these interactions with civil and political society as to the actions demanded from a prospective elected government to address their concerns.

In all meetings of the *Nagorik Committee* across the country, local political leaders along with prominent political and civil society activists, voiced concern over the dominance of money and muscle power in the selection of nominees for contesting elections. Senior political figures in the districts, with long and recognized service to their respective parties, feared they were being bypassed in the nomination process for the forthcoming election by candidates with limited records of public service but who were ready to spend large sums of money in their campaigns and could contribute generously to the party's electoral coffers. The idea of political parties nominating clean, credible, candidates to represent the electorate was not a fantasy of an elite segment of civil society but emerged out of the political felt needs of citizens around the country.

The vision statement

The *Nagorik Committee* finally drafted their Vision 2021 statement. It would be fair to say that our ideas projected the views and concerns of a broad cross section of political parties and civil society. The *Nagorik Committee's* document spelt out a progressive, inclusive but realistic vision for Bangladesh citizen's which may be expected to be realized at the nation's 50th anniversary. The statement projected the following vision for Bangladesh:

1. To become a participatory democracy
2. To have an efficient, accountable, transparent and decentralized system of governance
3. To become a poverty-free middle-income country
4. To have a nation of healthy citizens
5. To develop skilled and creative human resources

6. To become a globally integrated regional economic and commercial hub
7. To be environmentally sustainable
8. To be a more inclusive and equitable society

The provenance of the *Nagorik Committee's* statement is important because it was argued in the post-2008 election campaign that the Committee and its campaign for nominating clean candidates inspired the military's intervention in 1/11/2007 to bring about political reforms. The reality was that the *Nagorik Committee's* report spelt out an agenda for Bangladesh's prospective development journey. However, our outreach to the citizens of Bangladesh in the course of preparing the document gave voice to a much wider constituency of citizens where the concerns of the more respected local citizens and political personalities around the country were more fully projected. These concerns were documented in particular segments of the statement, especially in its first two provisions.

The important message from CPD's experience with civil society activism is the need for collective action to ensure the efficacy and sustainability of their efforts. CPD has taken a number of initiatives to reach out to CSOs so that they could exercise advocacy on important issues speaking with one voice. In the aftermath of the Rana Plaza tragedy in 2013 when 1,134 RMG workers lost their lives due to the shoddy and unregulated nature of their workspace, CPD reached out to a wider group of CSOs, to act collectively to both advise the government on possible remedial actions and to monitor public action in this area. We could sustain this collective enterprise over four years. Sadly, such collective endeavors remain infrequent. As long as CSOs remain self-centered, with limited capacity or inclination to reach out to each other, the voice of individual CSOs will remain muted, leaving them vulnerable to state action whenever the government feels unduly challenged in particular spheres of governance. The need for building a sustainable capacity for CS advocacy, through well organized networks committed to collective action, remains a work in progress.

Broadening CPD's Outreach

Citizen's platforms

For three decades CPD has been on the front line for promoting civil society as agents of policy advocacy as well as public accountability. Constructing such an interface between the state and civil society was intended as a positive sum game designed to strengthen democracy and improve the quality of governance.

This mission of CSOs serving as interlocutors between the state and civil society has not always worked out as we had intended in CPD. While there have been some positive results, we have often witnessed an adversarial relationship between the two key entities who needed to work together to construct a well governed society.

There were however some longer-term gains for civil society in general and CPD in particular through our engagement with the *citizen's platform* for SDGs. CPD emerged with a stronger awareness to carry forward its commitment to promote collective action among CSOs to enhance the capacity for advocacy by civil society. CPD remained one of the few CSOs which could reach out to other CSOs to come out of their self-imposed silos and work together for a common cause.

We believe from experience that if CSOs aspire to play a more influential role in its advocacy of reforms for addressing particular problems they will need to consciously move beyond their self-centered modes of work and act collectively to amplify their voice.

A further outcome from our experience with the *Nagorik Committee* and interaction with citizens around the country was the importance of reaching out to grass roots CSOs dispersed across the country who may be doing good work in an area but command little visibility with limited audibility. Here the initiative by DB, in expanding CPD's outreach through convening a Citizen's Platform for SDGs, which has brought together 130 CSOs from around the country to address the issue of implementation of the SDG's so that no underprivileged group in society

should be left behind, has played a valuable role. This extended network of organizations carries the potential of being mobilized to perform both advocacy and accountability roles on a much broader range of issues than just SDGs. The Citizen's Platform has accordingly been involved in mobilizing CSOs to report on the impact of Covid on less privileged members of the society and to assess the outcomes of various public programs targeted to them. Such evaluations of public action at the ground level enabled the platform to suggest further remedial actions by the state and CSOs to protect the interests of those left behind.

This Citizen's Platform was further engaged in preparing 11 Policy Briefs, put together through a process of nationwide grassroots consultation, to project the concerns of the deprived segments of society before prospective electoral contestants and voters so that none should be left behind. How far such voices from the grassroots could command the attention of the political parties depend on the credibility and contested nature of the election process which would influence the compulsion of the contestants to invoke the votes of the voiceless. Here both CPD's Citizens Platform and other CSOs would need to move beyond convening dialogues to project citizen's voices and would need to play a more proactive role in persuading the Leave No one Behind (LNOB) constituency to more explicitly express themselves at the polls.

CPD's outreach beyond our borders

Drawing on CPD's experience at home in constructing civil society networks we have become more active in building up the organization's regional and global outreach. CPD played a pioneering role in building trans-border institutional alliances to address the issue of Indo-Bangladesh relations. As far back as 1995 CPD partnered with the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), New Delhi, one of India's leading think tanks, in a civil society centered initiative to promote a mutually beneficial relationship between India and Bangladesh through a series of dialogues. The dialogues addressed long standing yet unresolved problems such as the sharing of the Ganges waters, the imbalanced trade relations between the two countries, problems and actions to improve connectivity, political and strategic issues. Such dialogues, drawing upon

a diversity of political opinion on either side, were conducted in a spirit of public reasoning and always sought constructive resolutions to the problems under discussion. Senior political leaders, such as I.K. Gujral, Somnath Chatterjee, Madhu Dandavate, SAMS Kibria, AMA Muhith, Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and Morshed Khan who moved on to assume high offices in their respective countries were conscientized through the dialogue process to address long standing divisions from a positive perspective. Our dialogues on the Ganges water and correcting trade imbalances played a role in creating space for a more meaningful interstate dialogue. The initial ten Indo-Bangladesh dialogues with CPR were followed up with five further dialogues where CPD partnered with two other Indian think tanks, India International Centre and Asian Institute of Transport Development, New Delhi.

CPD also engaged itself in promoting greater South Asian cooperation. This was an issue where I had been deeply involved in such earlier regional networks as Centre for the Study of Cooperation and Development (CSCD) and Coalition for Action on South Asian Cooperation (CASAC) from my BIDS days and sought to engage CPD in taking forward these initiatives by constructing an institution to promote cooperation. CPD accordingly took the lead in the founding of the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS) through constructing a network of leading South Asian think tanks and academic institutions to promote South Asian cooperation. The network included the Lahore University of Management Science (LUMS), Centre for Policy Research (CPR), and RIS from India, Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) and the Marga Institute from Sri Lanka, Institute of Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), Nepal and the Maldives. For five years, 2000-05, CPD served as the secretariat for SACEPS and I served as its Executive Director.

During my tenure SACEPS organized a series of programs designed to promote greater South Asian cooperation at a time when interstate commitment towards cooperation was weakening. SACEPS's programs during this period included the convening of a number of regional task forces hosted by the partner institutions of SACEPS, committed to identifying opportunities for cooperation in such areas as trade, investment, energy, transport and regional collaboration in negotiations with the WTO. One of the most ambitious programs organized by

SACEPS was the preparation of a Citizen's Charter for protecting the rights of the common people of South Asia. The reports of these various Task Forces were discussed through a series of regional seminars organized and hosted by the respective partners of SACEPS in Delhi, Dhaka, Katmandu, Colombo, Lahore and Male.

The SACEPS initiative was carried forward by the establishment of the South Asia Economic Summit (SAES), a network of institutions involving CPD, RIS and IPS who were originally partnered in SACEPS, joining hands with SWATEE (Nepal) and SDPI (Pakistan) both leading CSOs in their respective countries. Over the last 17 years the SAES network has convened annual gatherings which have brought together CSOs, political and business leaders from across South Asia to explore the scope for strengthening South Asian economic cooperation.

Unfortunately, the retreat at the state level from the idea of constructing a South Asian community and the withering away of the SAARC as an institution has impacted on the motivation of SAES members to sustain their enterprise. The dependence on South Asian CSOs for support from external funding agencies has further constrained the capability of civil society to fill the policy vacuum opened up by the erosion in the commitment to the idea of South Asia among its policymakers. In such circumstances if CPD remains committed to stand by its belief in the construction of a South Asian community it will need to assume a more entrepreneurial role in motivating its CSO partners within the region to move beyond convening periodic seminars such as SAES and becoming more active in their advocacy for promoting South Asia cooperation.

CPD will also need to rethink its role in sub-regional cooperation looking beyond the boundaries of South Asia. In the late 1990s I engaged myself in exploring the scope for furthering greater cooperation at the sub-regional level. I took up two studies, *Transforming Eastern South Asia: Building Growth Zones for Economic Cooperation* published by the University Press Ltd., Dhaka, 1999 and *Rediscovering the Southern Silk Route: Integrating Asia's Infrastructure*, also published by the University Press Ltd., in 2000 which were published as CPD policy studies. Our work at CPD coincided with the growing interest in the People's Republic of China (PRC) to connect its landlocked and economically

underdeveloped Yunnan Province with the Bay of Bengal through an agenda for establishing greater economic cooperation with the neighboring states of India, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

The Yunnan Academy of Social Science invited CPR in New Delhi and CPD to collaborate in building a network of think tanks to promote cooperation at the sub-regional level involving Bangladesh, China (Yunnan province), India (North Eastern region) and Myanmar in a grouping initially known as the Kunming Initiative now identified by the acronym Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM). CPD played an active role in participating in the BCIM programs which remained constrained due to the divergent perspective of the PRC and Government of India (GOI) towards graduating the sub-regional network from track-II to track-I.

CPD played a more hands on role in giving substance to the regional network by hosting a regional conference on behalf of BCIM in 2002, during the tenure of the BNP regime which was inaugurated by the then Foreign Minister, Morshed Khan and attended by other Ministers as well as opposition, business and civil society leaders. In 2013, during the AL regime, CPD hosted a motor rally designed to establish road connectivity between Kunming and Kolkata, which transited through Bangladesh.

In recent years CPD has networked with a broader constituency of well-known think tanks, through the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) where the IDRC, Ottawa played a catalytic role in encouraging greater interaction among think tanks across the global South so they could learn from each other. DB has again added value to the TTI efforts by playing a lead role in constructing a global network of Southern think tanks, institutionalized as *Southern Voice* to collectively monitor the implementation of the SDGs. CPD served as the Secretariat of Southern Voice for five years. We then supported the move of the secretariat to a think tank in Peru but remain fully involved in the activities of the network. These global involvements remain exclusively academic. CPD will again have to consider whether it wants to more proactively engage itself in mobilizing its partners in *Southern Voice* in amplifying the voice of the South through building a more just international economic order.

CPD: A Summing Up

The CPD journey is now in its 30th year as a civil society institution. The journey is still in progress. For a non-state institution, without any regular source of funding, operating in periods when the state was far from friendly, even adversarial in its approach to civil society, this remains a tribute not just to CPD but to the journey of civil society over three decades.

In the course of this paper, we have discussed how civil society had emerged and survived in years past as an issue-based entity designed to advocate the concerns of particular segments of society, articulating civic concerns on specific issues. What CPD brought to the table, at the end of 1993, was a civil society institution which committed itself to address a broader range of issues ranging from development policy and its implementation, the quality of governance, the state of democracy, the deprivations of the dispossessed, macroeconomic performance, external economic relations, regional cooperation and other issues of public concern.

This broad ranging mandate was to be realized through a quite innovative institution, at least for Bangladesh, committed to the application of public reasoning, to be deployed through the instrument of inclusive dialogues which brought together key stakeholders in particular spheres under address.

The convening of these diverse dialogues was, for the first time in Bangladesh institutionalized. Dialogues were convened regularly, month after month, year after year over 30 years, extending from the national level to cover issues of bilateral, regional and global concern. There are few if any institutions in South Asia which have sustained such a dialogue process over such a long period as its central mission.

In every area that CPD engaged itself as pioneers the dialogue process has proliferated over the years, drawing in a growing number of other institutions to periodically engage in hosting dialogues on various issues. Few if any such facilities could institutionalize their dialogues

as CPD managed to do. The end result of our long-enduring initiative has been that on any day of the year some institution or the other across Bangladesh may be convening a dialogue, and attracting a few lines, if not headlines, in the media. CPD's initiatives in hosting bilateral or regional dialogues have also encouraged other institutions to move into crossborder issues.

What greatly facilitated the dialogue process was the support from the print and electronic media. CPD consciously reached out to the media by expanding its dialogues from the closed doors of seminar rooms to address a national audience. Virtually all CPD dialogues emerged as public events. From its earliest public dialogue in the first month of 1994 CPD dialogues were projected as public events receiving extensive media coverage, frequently on the front page, occasionally as headlines in the print media.

From its earliest years as a public institution CPD emerged as a brand which was recognized not just in elite circles of Dhaka but across the country. Our principal spokespersons, have emerged as personifications of the brand of CPD and command wide public recognition as spokespersons for civil society.

In the area of CS advocacy not all institutions are equal. Some voices resonate more clearly across the public landscape. The sustainability of CPD dialogues, backed by quality research continues to attract wide public attention. Such a process has ensured that we remain perhaps the most articulate, visible and recognized voice within civil society today. This has, of course, ensured strong, not necessarily favorable, responses from successive governments.

What CPD has achieved over the years, by drawing in many more CS institutions to address particular public concerns, is to hold successive governments accountable for their acts of both commission and omission. This has emerged as a particularly valuable public resource in recent times when the voice of the political opposition had been rendered less audible. In contrast, most critiques of state actions, originating from CS, particularly from some organizations such as CPD, invoked largely negative responses from the government of the day. Since much

of these criticisms were of a constructive nature and provided a variety of suggestions for corrective action the government did itself a serious disservice by shutting out the voice of civil society.

The government could not completely ignore the strong body of commentary by CS pointing out deficits in their governance process. They occasionally took cognizance of CS by defending their actions in a less polemical tone. This even included the promise of corrective action in response to some criticism. Such positive responses ultimately did little to reverse the largely adversarial relationship which prevailed between the state and civil society.

While the voice of CS and some sections of the media remain audible there is no scope for offering a free pass to any regime to do what it likes. Under such circumstances some tension may prevail between CS and the state, depending on the sense of insecurity of a particular regime and their willingness or capacity to take action against their critics. But such actions carry not just domestic but also international consequences since particular CSOs have managed to project their presence at the national level as well as regional and global levels.

In the final analysis CS and more visible organisations such as CPD and TI have to always consider how far they can discharge their role as public auditors without invoking a more fatal response from the state. That Bangladesh in its 53rd year should have created such an environment where CSOs, which can never mount any real political challenge to the state, have to watch their step, suggests that CPD's journey has not reached its once promised destination of contributing to the emergence of a society inspired by the vision of our founding fathers. But we have survived these 30 years. We remain relevant and recognized both by the state and society. Such a knowledge leaves us with a sense of satisfaction that CPD's 30 year journey has not been without some public purpose.

As I conclude this narrative there is some hope that CPD's journey may continue under less perilous circumstances. A new dispensation, brought about through a youth-led mass mobilization which dethroned an autocratic regime, has assumed office on August 8, 2024. This government is uniquely headed by a global icon, Professor Muhammad

Yunus, a Nobel Laureate. Yunus has been a CPD Board member of longstanding and has remained an active participant over the years in various dialogues convened by CPD and civil society initiatives such as the *Nagorik Committee*. He is also a Board member of longstanding in SACEPS and has spoken out on his support for greater South Asian cooperation after he assumed office at the head of the Interim Government.

The regime is committed to an agenda of reforms designed to construct a sustainable democratic process. Such a political order would be expected to promote free speech and independent thinking which will hopefully guide the actions of any incoming government elected through a process of free, fair and credible elections. It is hoped that such changes, brought about at the cost of over a thousand dead and many more casualties will serve to strengthen opportunities for the institutionalization of public reasoning within the service of a more just and democratic society.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) *A Pioneer on Many Fronts*

I congratulate the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and its founder Professor Rehman Sobhan for initiating the practice of informed public discussion on significant issues of public concern in Bangladesh. He and his colleagues at the CPD can be proud of their achievement in strengthening citizen's voice over the course of the last thirty years despite efforts of different regimes to constrain civil society. The CPD has gained recognition nationally, within the Asian region and globally for generating knowledge, setting policy and action agendas and demanding transparency and accountability from public institutions.

The CPD has been a pioneer on many fronts. It has pioneered the organization of civil society-led public dialogues where all relevant stakeholders—government, political opposition, development partners, representatives of political parties, civil society, business as well as worker organizations—felt it necessary to participate. The CPD dialogues, covered extensively by the media, have played an important role in educating citizens and raising public awareness about complex and contested public issues. The CPD has conducted pioneering research. More importantly through its public dialogue process the CPD has created wider demand for data collection, analysis and research. The CPD's outreach to other civil society and professional organisations has strengthened collective voice of the citizens.



Professor Rounaq Jahan
Member of the Board of Trustees and
Distinguished Fellow, CPD

I have been privileged to be associated with the CPD's journey at different times in different capacities. During 1993-1994, Professor Sobhan invited me to join in his consultations with the US based academics and think tanks when he was conceptualizing CPD's work program, particularly the governance study. I was at that time teaching and doing research at Columbia University in New York. The CPD's work on governance was a pioneering initiative which explored the role of governance in determining development outcomes. In the years that followed, CPD had always highlighted the significance of the governance factor in analyzing Bangladesh's development policies.

In 1996 when I was organizing an international conference at Columbia University to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of Bangladesh's independence, we invited CPD to co-sponsor the conference and identify scholars to write papers on different themes. Though CPD had then just started its journey and was relatively unknown, my colleagues and I at Columbia University had full confidence that under Professor Sobhan's dynamic leadership it will soon develop as a world-class institution. The Columbia University conference volume was published by Zed books, London in 2000. The book titled, 'Bangladesh: Promise and Performance', provided an overview of the first quarter century of Bangladesh's socio-economic political development. It still serves as a textbook for students and researchers of Bangladesh studies.

I was fortunate to organize another international conference, this time on behalf of the CPD and co-sponsored by Cornell university, to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Bangladesh's independence in 2021. This conference too resulted in the publication of a book, titled 'Fifty Years of Bangladesh: Economy, Politics, Society and Culture', Routledge, London, 2023. The organization of the two international conferences and later the publication of the two conference volumes demonstrates CPD's enduring commitment to promote a better understanding of the complexities of the Bangladesh development story to a global audience.

I participated during 2012-2013 in CPD's research co-operation program with Chr. Michelsen Institution (CMI) in Norway which produced, among others, studies on the parliament and political parties in Bangladesh. The latter study was published as a book, titled 'Political

Parties in Bangladesh: Challenges of Democratization', Prothoma, 2015. It was, again, a pioneering initiative as it was the first study on political parties published in the country. To this date, the book remains the only such academic study on this critical topic of public concern.

While my involvement with the CPD has primarily been in the area of research, I had also been privileged to witness firsthand the impact of CPD's work in legitimizing the role of civil society as a key stakeholder in the design of public policies in Bangladesh. In 1996, as a member of a World Bank (WB) led mission negotiating health sector reforms in Bangladesh, I was able to persuade fellow team members about the importance of listening to civil society only after they attended a dialogue on health and population sector organized by the CPD. Prior to that dialogue, the WB consultations were always limited between the government and development partners.

My fellow team members of the WB mission did not believe that any credible civil society organization existed in Bangladesh which could advocate and debate development policies! But after the CPD dialogue the WB team was convinced that it was important to include civil society consultation as a regular part of policy and program formulation and implementation. The team recommended that stakeholder consultation including civil society should be made an integral part of health and population sector programming in Bangladesh.

Over the years the CPD has undertaken various initiatives to create a common citizen's voice to promote policy agendas. I remember, in 2001 prior to the national elections, CPD set up task forces consisting of both professionals and activists to prepare policy briefs for consideration by the contesting political parties. In 2006, prior to the scheduled 2007 elections, CPD launched a nation-wide campaign for clean politics. It

I have witnessed CPD's success in affirming civil society's role in finding solutions to contested issues or opening doors between Bangladesh and her neighbors. In the 1990s the CPD organized a series of Indo-Bangladesh dialogues which facilitated the signing of the Ganges Water Treaty and promotion of connectivity and trade between the two countries.

facilitated the creation of a Nagorik Committee (citizens' committee) which organized consultations with citizens in different parts of the country and prepared a report which was titled Vision 2021. Prior to the 2008 national elections, the Awami League incorporated many of the suggestions of the Nagorik Committee report in its election manifesto.

In recent years, the CPD has established a Citizens' Platform for the SDGs which is engaged in focusing attention on the challenges of not leaving anybody behind.

The CPD's work on strengthening civil society voice is not limited to Bangladesh. I have witnessed CPD's success in affirming civil society's role in finding solutions to contested issues or opening doors between Bangladesh and her neighbors. CPD organized a series of Indo-Bangladesh dialogues which facilitated the signing of the Ganges Water Treaty and promotion of connectivity and trade between the two countries. Similarly, CPD organized dialogues to improve trade and connectivity with China, Northeastern states of India and Myanmar. I participated in some of these dialogues.

On its 30th year, the CPD can celebrate its many achievements on many fronts. For me the CPD's major accomplishments are its success in transforming public discourse and changing public policies in many areas in Bangladesh and beyond its borders.

My Life and Times with the CPD *A Journey Through the Memory Lane*

When *Professor Rehman Sobhan* first floated the idea of setting up an organization, a Centre, with the objective of organizing dialogues with participation of key involved actors to discuss issues of economic and development policymaking in Bangladesh, I must concede that I was somewhat skeptical. This was the early 1990s, 1993 to be more precise. Those were the days when development partners held the sway, and policymaking was confined to only a very few fortunate and privileged people-development partners, some politicians and a few high-level government officials who were privy to what was going on. The reforms and policies that were being prepared, and implemented, often came as part of aid conditionalities. Concerned stakeholders had hardly any say in all these, although these had far-reaching consequences for the citizens, private sector, investors and business, the economy and the future of the country. But *Professor Sobhan* is not a person to be daunted by obstacles, challenges, and doubts. He resolved to question the status quo and test out the waters, as they say. He set up the CPD as a Trust in December 1993, with the objective of bringing all key stakeholders to discuss and deliberate on important policy issues of the day.

However, I presume there is a background to *Professor Sobhan's* initiative to set up the CPD which will help to understand his initiative and thought and action process. While still serving as the Director General



Professor Mustafizur Rahman
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of BIDS, during the autocratic rule of the 1980s, *Professor Sobhan* was already questioning the way the economy was being run, and policies being formulated. He took the exceptionally courageous initiative to prepare and edit a volume titled *The Decade of Stagnation*, a scathing comment on the experience of Bangladesh's economic management and performance in the 1980s. Looking back, I feel this was the time when he started to think about initiating an exercise to prepare an alternative strategy and forward looking agendas for Bangladesh's development over the next decades, and mobilise public opinion around the recommended measures.

An opportunity soon arose when he became a member of the Advisory Council (December 1990 - February 1991), the first Caretaker Government of Bangladesh, which was headed by Justice Shahabuddin as the Chief Advisor. Sir took the initiative to bring together some of the best economists, experts, and development practitioners of the country to prepare a set of policies which the soon-to-be elected government could pursue and implement during its tenure. This is how the 29 Task Force Reports were prepared in the record time of three months, thanks to the dedicated hard work of more than 250 national experts who responded enthusiastically to Sir's invitation, and devoted their time on a purely voluntary basis. It was in every sense an exercise in patriotism. UPL took up the challenge of bringing the four volumes out within the shortest possible time. Each of the Task Force Reports came up with a wealth of information and analyses, proposing policies, reforms, institutions and actionable measures to address the emergent concerns that had accumulated during the 'decade of stagnation'.

However, Sir soon found that the appetite for serious consideration of the Task Force recommendations by the policymakers and political leadership was rather wanting. I guess that was the time when he thought of setting up an organization which would be geared to holding dialogues and discussions around some of the most compelling issues put forward in the Task Force Reports. He got CPD registered as a Trust and invited some of the leading lights of the civil society and NGO community to be on board and join as Founding Trustees. He designed the logo of the CPD himself and got on with the task of setting up the CPD with passion and commitment. He invested all his efforts and goodwill to convince

representatives of important stakeholder groups about the usefulness of inclusive and participatory dialogues, and the need for engaging in constructive discussion and debate around agendas that were being proposed, promoted and pursued at the time. *Professor Rehman Sobhan's* lifelong dedication to advance the cause of the people, as a key proponent of the two economy theory, his role as a freedom fighter during the war of liberation, his work as a member of Bangladesh's first Planning Commission, his honesty and integrity, the force of his conviction about the justification of what he was proposing, as also his reasoning, arguments and persuasion elicited favorable response from all those who he approached with his idea.

Professor Sobhan invited my close friend *Debapriya* to join him in the journey he was going to embark upon, and *Debapriya* in turn got me in touch with Sir. And that is how both of us got ourselves involved in the CPD's journey from the very beginning, a journey that has defined our own professional lives and personal development in such profound ways.

Sir succeeded in organizing the very first dialogue some time towards the end of 1993, with participation of many of the involved players in Bangladesh's development policymaking including key development partners and high profile representatives of major stakeholder groups belonging to politics, business and civil society.

My initial skepticism about Sir's initiative originated from my doubts about the willingness of policymakers and development partners to be engaged with the civil society in a discussion process where their views were likely to be challenged and contested. However, I was pleasantly surprised to see that my apprehensions proved to be wrong. Gradually, all important stakeholders including Ministers, high level government officials (when

My initial skepticism about Sir's initiative originated from my doubts about the willingness of policymakers and development partners to be engaged with the civil society in a discussion process where their views were likely to be challenged and contested. However, I was pleasantly surprised to see that my apprehensions proved to be wrong.

Ministers came they also joined), and representatives of important stakeholder groups including political leaders, trade unions, business organisations, academics and intellectuals, and NGOs started to respond positively to *Professor Sobhan's* call and joined in large numbers. CPD started to organise the dialogues on a regular basis. It was evident that Sir had addressed an important and acute felt need. Development partners also joined the discussions at his invitation, although, I presume, in the beginning they were apprehensive about what it was all about, and whether they will be put under fire without being given a fair hearing. This was not difficult to understand. They have never been subjected to questioning by civil society actors, nor were they asked to respond to critical views voiced by common citizens.

It is encouraging and satisfying to see that the culture of dialogues and discussions is now well-established in Bangladesh. However, in those days this was quite a novel idea. Sir used to take meticulous preparation before every dialogue, carefully selecting the themes to be discussed, grouping the questions by issues, sequencing those, and thoughtfully identifying the people who could contribute to the discussion in an informed way. While moderating the dialogue he tried his best to keep the discussion focused and action-centred and solution-oriented. This often meant that he had to rein in the 'Argumentative Bengali', and do his best to keep the dialogue on course and on target. In doing so, he deployed both his intellectual authority and diplomatic subtleties and (I guess intentionally) toned down his natural combative and argumentative self and style. He handled the discussions even-handedly and without pre-judging, respecting the veracity of the argument and merit of the point being made and the evidence being presented. Sir did not agree with the way many of the policies were being formulated at the time- pace of trade liberalisation, the way privatisation policy was being implemented, how investment policies were being formulated and reforms were being pursued. He used to argue his points forcefully but also allowed others full freedom and opportunity to present their own points of view. He always tried his best to tease out concrete outcomes that best served the interests of the economy and country, and in a way that addressed the concerns of common citizens, farmers, workers, marginalised people, small producers and businesses. Sometimes the participants agreed on a point, other times some and, at times many, disagreed on other points.

It was all about evidence and reasoning and nothing personal. Everyone appreciated and respected Sir's approach and intent. And that is how the culture and practice of dialogue gradually evolved and developed in Bangladesh. This *modus operandi* was subsequently widely emulated, with varying degrees of success. Sir sometimes jokingly says that he should have patented the Dialogue Process in Bangladesh! There is no doubt an element of truth in it.

Since I was entrusted by Sir with the task of preparing the dialogue reports, I had the opportunity to observe the dialogue proceedings from very close quarters. This was a great learning process for me. I must confess that, in those early days the drafts that I prepared and took to Sir, and the edited dialogue reports that in the end came to me from him, were often quite different products. Sometimes I hardly found a sentence of mine in his edited version. But Sir never raised his voice or said a word of discouragement; in fact he never said anything but 'thank you', and 'excellent'. But then as I look back to those days I now realise that Sir was always teaching me, in a very subtle and sublime way. Working with him so closely in those early days of the CPD was an enormously rewarding experience for me, enabling me to learn so many new things from him, every day, helping me to grow both professionally and as an individual. I now realise that I was indeed investing in myself and I am happy that it proved to be a very good investment. For Debapriya and myself, it is indeed our good fortune that we got this opportunity to be associated with Sir at very early stages of our professional careers.

When Sir first launched the Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD), as a homegrown alternative assessment of the state of the Bangladesh economy, I had the opportunity to see from close quarters the dedication and hardwork that he invested in this pioneering endeavour. During those days, CPD did not have the in-house professional resources to undertake such a formidable task. But at Sir's request, many of Bangladesh's leading experts, mostly from the BIDS, but also from the academia, came forward to contribute to the IRBDs. As IRBD coordinator during those initial years, and for many years afterwards, I gratefully recall their exceptionally valuable contribution in getting the CPD's flagship IRBD programme off the ground. However, to set the record straight, although he asked me to be

the IRBD coordinator, during the early years of the IRBD it was Sir himself who did most of the leg works, both organisational and intellectual. Indeed, the pressure of this work took a heavy toll on his health, resulting in his hospitalisation multiple for bypass surgeries. And all these he did on a voluntary basis, without taking any financial remuneration, a practice he has continued till today.

Over these past years CPD has undergone many important changes. In his write-up for this volume, Sir has written extensively about this period and how CPD has evolved into what it is today. Sir has written that he was not sure whether, and to what extent, to give institutional shape and substance to the CPD. But he took the decision to develop CPD as an institution and as a think tank, following a review carried out at his request, by a number of eminent personalities. He invited Debapriya to take the responsibility as the ED. In 1998, Sir relinquished his responsibilities as the ED, continuing to remain as the Chair of the CPD's Board of Trustees. Debapriya left his job at the BIDS to join the CPD as ED on a full time basis. It was by no means an easy decision to leave a secure permanent job and join an organisation whose human resource base was small, and financial resource base was weak. His was indeed a leap of faith- a confidence in Sir's vision about the CPD, a belief in himself and a recognition of the need for a civil society think tank such as the CPD in the context of Bangladesh. It was by any measure not an easy task to follow Sir's footsteps. But as Sir has written about, and we have all been witness to, Debapriya rose to the occasion and the challenges that came with it. CPD embarked on a new phase of journey under his leadership. This was a phase of institutionalisation and rapid expansion and transformation of the CPD. Debapriya infused vigour, energy and bold thinking, steering CPD from the phase of dialogue and discussion to broadening its remit of

Debapriya infused vigour, energy and bold thinking, steering CPD from the phase of dialogue and discussion to broadening its remit of activities, with research expanding to new areas and policy influencing strengthened through civic activism and agenda building. Induction of the current Executive Director Dr Fahmida Khatun in 2002 as also others into the CPD family ensured that CPD was getting prepared to take the long haul.

activities, with research expanding to new areas and policy influencing strengthened through civic activism and agenda building. He brought in new blood to the CPD, by inducting a new generation of young associates, took up many innovative initiatives, broadened partnerships, at home and abroad, and put special efforts into strengthening CPD's collaboration with the media. Induction of the current Executive Director Dr Fahmida Khatun in 2002 as also others into the CPD family ensured that CPD was getting prepared to take the long haul.

This was the time when CPD started to rely primarily on our own in-house human resources to prepare the IRBDs. CPD also initiated research on many new issues and areas. CPD began to organise workshops for capacity building of the media, civil society actors and government officials, in a number of areas, both current and of medium to long term interests to Bangladesh. With encouragement, advice and full support from Sir and the CPD's Board of Trustees, and with the full backing of all his colleagues at CPD, Debapriya led from the front and helped shape CPD's emergence as a leading civil society think tank in the region. CPD, started to run, as it were, on three legs—organisation of dialogues and generation of evidence-based research, both enriching, complementing and strengthening each other, along with undertaking civic activism for policy influencing, agenda building and awareness raising.

CPD branched out into new initiatives, by preparing Policy Briefs as inputs to the work of the incoming government, in 2000, and by reviewing the implementation of the Policy Brief recommendations, in 2003. Debapriya also initiated the tradition of CPD's budget reaction at the media briefing on the next of the presentation of the National Budget.

A major initiative in civic activism was launched by the CPD, in collaboration with the Prothom Alo, The Daily Star and Channel i, in 2006, to promote, and in support of, the cause of good governance and accountability in economy and polity. This was carried out through mobilisation of public opinion around the country, by organising town-hall meetings and holding consultations with local civil society groups. The aspirations of the citizens were captured in the publication titled Bangladesh Vision 2021. As Convenor of the initiative, Debapriya played the central role, aided by the CPD as the secretariat, and supported by

the three partners of the initiative. This unique exercise in civic empowerment was guided by the *Nagorik Committee* as its advisory body which was chaired by *Professor Rehman Sobhan* and which included many of the leading lights of the Bangladesh civil society.

Debapriya took the lead in laying the institutional foundation of the CPD, by taking initiatives to formulate the service rules, putting in place robust financial systems, designing the management structure and introducing good governance practices in all spheres of CPD's activities. It was at this time that CPD's Research, Dialogue and Communication, Finance and Administration Divisions gradually took shape with specific division of labour, but working in unison towards attaining common goals. Indeed, many of the 'firsts' at CPD was introduced during Debapriya's tenure as the ED, which were strengthened and further developed over the subsequent years, under successive leaderships. CPD has continued to benefit from those in the years to come. All we colleagues at the CPD extended full support to Debapriya to achieve our common aspirations as mandated by the CPD's Mission and Vision.

Sir was always there, as our ever-present guide, giving advice whenever we approached, which was quite often, but never trying to impose his opinion or intervene in any way in the day to day management of the CPD. And there could not have been a more supportive, more encouraging and more enlightened Board as the one CPD had, and indeed continues to have to this day.

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Thus, when Debapriya left to take up the responsibility as Ambassador to the Bangladesh Mission in Geneva, in 2007, and Sir asked me to take up the responsibility of ED, CPD was already on solid ground. I saw my task mostly as consolidating and securing what Debapriya

was leaving behind, and building on what have been achieved. I applied for, and was granted, a four year extraordinary leave by the University of Dhaka. Till then, I was teaching and spending all my free time at CPD, supporting Sir and then Debapriya, at the beginning on a voluntary basis, and later on as Research Director when Debapriya joined as the ED. When the elections of 2008 were held and the newly elected Awami League-led government took the helm of power, CPD organised a two-day Conference to identify actions and reforms that needed to be pursued by the new government. A large number of Ministers and high level government officials attended the various sessions, where CPD senior colleagues and leading Bangladeshi experts presented keynote papers and took part in the discussions.

At the completion of the four year leave, Sir and the Board asked me to continue to serve as the ED. I took, for me the not-so-easy decision, to apply for early retirement from the University of Dhaka, having taught for twenty five years. To be honest, I missed my teaching, I missed my students and I missed my colleagues at the Dhaka University. However, the die was cast. I got on with continuing the task entrusted to me by Sir and the Board, with unwavering support from all my colleagues at the CPD.

My time as ED was greatly facilitated when CPD was selected for support under the Think Tank Initiative, through a very rigorous and highly competitive selection process that involved many leading civil society think tanks from the global south. CPD's work on periodic assessment of the state of macroeconomy through the IRBD programme was further strengthened and we branched out into new research areas and issues under the broad themes of trade and investment, agriculture, environment, regional cooperation and connectivity, global integration of the LDCs, post-Rana Plaza monitoring, to name a few.

Sir had continued to serve as Executive Director of the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS), pursuing his lifelong passion of advancing the cause of regional cooperation among countries of the SAARC, a region of 'distant neighbours' as he coined it. CPD hosted the SACEPS for five years before it moved to Kathmandu.

Sir continued the various initiatives he has been pursuing to deepen regional cooperation in South and Southern Asia. His own seminal scholarly works on deepening trade, transport and investment connectivities among the countries of these region laid the intellectual foundation of many of these initiatives. One recalls his pioneering study titled *Rediscovering the Southern Silk Route* published in 1990s. The BCIM (Bangladesh, China, and India Myanmar) initiative needs special mention in this connection. Indeed, CPD was the focal point of this civil society initiative in Bangladesh when it was first launched in 1999, then known as the Kunming Initiative, with *Professor Sobhan* taking the lead from the Bangladesh side. Sir played an important role in BCIM initiative's graduation from Track 2 (civil society) to Track 1.5 (civil society as also inter-governmental). CPD hosted three of the Kunming Initiative (BCIM) rounds which took place by rotation in all the four participating countries. The Kolkata to Kunming (K2K) Car Rally, which took place in 2013 (with the slogan Building Bonds, Fostering Friendship) and which CPD helped to organise in collaboration with the Ministry of Roads and Highways, GoB, was a major milestone in this initiative. When the Rally passed through Bangladesh, CPD took the lead to welcome the rally participants in Dhaka. We succeeded, to some extent, in institutionalising the efforts with setting up of the Country Study Group in each of the participating countries, with the CPD being closely involved with the Bangladesh Study Group. However, regrettably, geopolitical and geostrategic considerations having taken precedence and, the BCIM initiative has now gone into the back burner.

The series of Indo-Bangladesh Dialogues, initiated by the CPD and steered by *Professor Sobhan*, in collaboration with partners institutions from India, continued to be held over many years. These dialogues can claim some credit in the change of the discourse on deepening Bangladesh-India ties from 'whether' to 'how', identifying concrete actions towards mutually benefitting and win-win outcomes, particularly in the areas of trade, connectivity, water sharing and energy cooperation. Many concrete initiatives were subsequently taken in light of the recommendations put forward in those dialogues.

During my tenure as the ED, at Debapriya's initiative, our outreach was further expanded through hosting by the CPD of two global initiatives—

the LDC IV Monitor, geared to monitoring the decisions of the Istanbul Programme of Actions for the LDCs adopted at the LDC IV Summit in Istanbul in 2011, and the *Southern Voice* for post-MDGs, a partnership of 43 leading southern think tanks which were all awardees of the aforesaid Think Tank Initiative. Thanks to these two platforms, CPD's global exposure was further expanded and strengthened. These platforms also enabled CPD colleagues to interact with leading experts from both the global north and the global south, enriching themselves professionally, and also enabling them to contribute to the global discourse on issues of concern and of interest to the LDCs and the global south through participation in various important international events and fora.

The South Asia Economic Summit (SAES), initiated by Sir and our late lamented friend Dr Saman Kelegama, the then ED of Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Colombo, Sri Lanka, has continued to play an important role in advancing the cause of regional cooperation in South Asia at a time when the official process has fallen into deep hibernation. Till now CPD has successfully hosted three SAES events in Dhaka.

CPD's strategic vision of being a think tank with local roots and global reach was being realised through implementation of various research, dialogue, communication and outreach initiatives.

Sir has continued to remain highly active, with scholarly contributions in a diverse range of issues, too many to mention here. Publication of his seminal volume titled *Challenging the Injustice of Poverty in South Asia* was an important scholarly work he carried out that needs special mention. This volume remains a defining contribution to the poverty literature of our time, here in the region and anywhere, offering concrete actions to eradicate poverty. As a matter of fact, the recommendations put

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forward by *Professor Sobhan* and his collaborators remain as relevant today as they were then, and should be seen as critically important from the perspective of attaining the SDGs, particularly SDG1 on eradicating extreme poverty. Sir has remained active as a public intellectual and has continued to write popular columns, often taking a bold stand on many contentious issues of the day. Readers in Bangladesh will know what I am talking about.

CPD's commitment to upholding the interest of the marginalised groups in alignment with its Mission and Vision, took an important step forward through the establishment of the *Citizen's Platform* for SDGs, Bangladesh, which now has more than 140 grassroots organizations as partners. Initiated by Debapriya as Convener, and hosted by the CPD as the Secretariat, and with support from the Core Group and the Advisory Group, the *Citizen's Platform* over the last eight years have been pursuing the cause of implementation of the SDGs in Bangladesh, keeping the SDG objective of addressing the vulnerabilities faced by the marginalised groups of the country and by keeping the leave no one behind spirit of the SDGs at the core of its activities.

I am personally grateful to Sir, members of CPD Board of Trustees and all my colleagues at CPD for their encouragement and unfailing support during my work as the ED between 2007 and 2017. Sir and the Board were always there to provide advice and guidance in helping me carry out my responsibilities. And I was greatly helped by Debapriya, who stayed on at the CPD as Distinguished Fellow following his return from Geneva in 2011, where he had left his mark through his energetic persuasion of the cause of Bangladesh and the group of LDCs in the context of multilateral trade negotiations, first as Bangladesh's Ambassador and then as Advisor to the WTO Director General on LDCs. Indeed, he has continued to proactively pursue the cause of sustainable graduation of Bangladesh and other LDCs through his scholarly works as also as a member of the Committee for Development Policy (CDP).

My job was greatly facilitated when the Board appointed Fahmida as the Research Director in 2013. Under her watch, CPD's research portfolio was further enriched and CPD carried out a number of pioneering works. Fahmida's own work at this time on women's contribution to

the country's economy, carried out with some of our colleagues and in collaboration with Manusher Janno Foundation (MJF), helped shape national policies concerning women and provided a powerful tool to the women's movement in Bangladesh.

CPD has been able to further consolidate and branch out into newer areas over the past seven years when Dr Fahmida took over from me as the Executive Director of the CPD in 2017. When the Board appointed Fahmida as the ED, I was very happy that I was handing over CPD's stewardship to a very capable colleague who has demonstrated her commitment to the CPD by taking leave from her job at the BIDS and joining the CPD in 2001. She is an accomplished researcher and an excellent leader who had honed her abilities as part of the senior management of the CPD for many years. By the time she took over the responsibilities as the ED, having served as CPD's Research Director for several years prior to this, Fahmida was fully prepared and ready to take up the challenge of running the CPD. This was indeed a generational transition, from Debapriya and myself, continuing the tradition of periodic leadership change at CPD which started with Sir handing over the executive responsibilities to Debapriya in 1998.

CPD's dialogue and research activities have gone into new areas during the time of her tenure as the ED. My colleagues have undertaken many important studies in the areas of macro, fiscal and monetary policies, debt default, and banking reforms, development effectiveness, industrial and trade policies, green energy and green growth, energy policy, compliance issues in export-oriented industries, environmental sustainability, gender issues, SDG implementation progress and deficits, LDC graduation challenges, south-south Cooperation and reforms of global institutions, to name only a few.

Fahmida, ably supported by our colleagues, has been able to take CPD to newer heights of excellence, performance and recognition. The fourteenth SAES in Dhaka, in November 2023, further rounds of Indo-Bangladesh Dialogues and collaborative programmes with bilateral partners and grassroots organisations have helped CPD to consolidate its reputation within Bangladesh, in the region and also beyond. The branding and reputation of CPD have further strengthened

under her stewardship. Interactions with parliament members, youth and grassroots organisations have become more regular and stronger thanks to CPD's various programmes and those undertaken by the Citizen's Platform. CPD entered into the era of digitalisation during her tenure, with enhanced use of the various digital platforms to strengthen CPD's outreach and communication, and through introduction of digital technology-based practices in CPD's research, human resource and administrative as also financial management. A new generation of colleagues have joined the CPD during her tenure. They are CPD's strength and its future.

The transition of CPD leadership, the third one with Fahmida, sets CPD apart from many other organisations. This has been noticed and appreciated by many in Bangladesh.

With Professor Rounaq Jahan joining the CPD, first as a Distinguished Fellow and then as a Board Member, CPD's research portfolio has been further enriched in recent years. Professor Jahan's studies on the role of political parties and the parliament, carried out at CPD, remain important contributions to studies on political governance in Bangladesh. The recently published volume to commemorate Fifty Years of Bangladesh, co-edited by Professor Raunaq Jahan and *Professor Sobhan*, (Fifty Years of Bangladesh: Economy, Politics, Society and Culture; Routledge, 2024) is an exceptionally rich contribution to the scholarship on Bangladesh which will continue to benefit researchers and keen readers of Bangladesh's post-independence journey in the years to come.

The collegial leadership that has evolved at the CPD, institutionalisation of the governance system, periodic transition of leadership, the enlightened role and inspiring guidance of our Board of Trustee, all these have played a crucial role in the evolution of the CPD over the past three decades. During these years the number of CPD alumni has also risen quite significantly. Those who have worked at CPD and went to other places, professions and careers often mention that their stay at CPD has been a most rewarding experience. We are proud of the valuable contribution the CPD alumni are making in different spheres and in various capacities, in Bangladesh and abroad.

The journey that CPD has undertaken has not been an easy one. Life of civil society organisations in countries such as ours, which strive to remain financially independent from the government, challenge policymakers of the day by way of putting under scrutiny and critical examination various policies and measures, albeit in a constructive way, tries to uphold interests of those who are left behind and try to give voice to the voiceless, is not without problems. When the space for civic voice, civic space and civic activism shrinks, the work becomes even more challenging and daunting. But we believe deeply that this is a worthwhile and worthy cause to pursue.

In his write-up Sir has elaborated on some of the key developments and turning points in CPD's three decade journey. In the course of these past thirty years, CPD had the good fortune of receiving support and encouragement from many people and a diverse range of organisations. Indeed, CPD could not have come to where it is today without their contribution and solidarity. I would like to take this opportunity to register our deep appreciation to all our dialogue and discussion participants and well-wishers belonging to grassroots organisations and all segments of society, for their goodwill and support for CPD. I sadly recall here that over these past years we have lost many of our regular dialogue participants, research collaborators, partners in various initiatives and well-wishers. A special sense of loss may be registered for some of our founding Trustees, as also some who had later joined the Board. I would like to express our deep gratitude to all of them. They have been a crucial part of CPD's journey, history and legacy. I would also like take this opportunity to thankfully recall the generous support extended by our partners and collaborators over these past years which enabled us to undertake many of our initiatives.

For me, life with and at the CPD has been an exciting journey, now spanning almost three decades, almost the same as the life span of the CPD itself. My transition from life as a teacher to life as a CPDian has been both a rewarding and a fulfilling experience. Thanks to CPD, I have learnt so many things, had the opportunity to work closely with so many talented people, met with so many exceptionally gifted people and learned from and interacted with so many dedicated activists belonging

to various grassroots organisations. This would never have been possible had I not dedicated a significant part of my life to CPD.

For all these opportunities, I owe a debt of profound gratitude to *Professor Rehman Sobhan* Sir who has helped broaden my horizon and inspired me 'to take the other path that made all the difference'. I have read somewhere that an ordinary teacher tells, a good teacher teaches, an excellent teacher demonstrates, a great teacher inspires. Sir has always been an inspiration for me. And I remain grateful to the CPD Board of Trustees and all my colleagues at the CPD for making my journey with CPD such a worthwhile, rewarding and fulfilling experience.

A 30-Year Journey of Commitment and Progress *Looking Ahead to Future Aspirations*

1. CPD came into being in response to the growing need for a civil society voice

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has undertaken an exciting journey spanning over three decades. In 1993, Professor Rehman Sobhan, an eminent economist and civil society leader in Bangladesh, took the initiative to establish the Centre in response to the growing need of Bangladeshi civil society for a platform of its own following the return to democracy in the early 1990s, after a decade-long military rule. It was a period when important policy reforms were being pursued in Bangladesh.

Professor Sobhan, along with eight other leading citizens of the country, acted as founding members of the CPD Board of Trustees. Since then, a number of eminent people have joined CPD's board as distinguished members. CPD has been fortunate to have on its board globally acclaimed personalities and social entrepreneurs such as the founder of BRAC, the late Sir Fazle Hasan Abed and the founder of Grameen Bank, Nobel Laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus.

At the time of its establishment, its board members perceived that the CPD would contribute to strengthening the country's democratization process by promoting a demand-driven developmental agenda and



Dr Fahmida Khatun

Executive Director
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

contributing to a process whereby stakeholders would have a say in the design, implementation and monitoring of the developmental policies.

CPD was established with the objectives of—(i) making citizens aware of policy issues that affect their lives and livelihoods and the future of their country, (ii) facilitating public discussion on those policy issues with a view to building broad-based support for policies that service the felt-needs of the common citizens of the country, and (iii) influencing the process and outcome of policymaking in Bangladesh through proactive policy advocacy.

Initially, CPD focused on organizing dialogues addressing key issues of concern to Bangladesh's emerging civil society. Over time, the Centre has evolved and expanded its scope of activities, venturing into research, advocacy, and policy influencing in a number of core areas. This evolution is a testament to CPD's growth and adaptability.

The Centre's program portfolio now includes research initiatives, dialogues, publication and dissemination activities, and networking-related initiatives. CPD's focus is on frontier issues that are critical to Bangladesh's development process in the present context, and which are expected to shape and influence the country's development prospects over the mid-term horizon.

Over the past decades, CPD has undertaken a transformative journey, reflected in enhanced organizational strength, higher research quality, more effective outreach, and better-equipped infrastructure. Strengthening in all these areas has helped CPD gain enhanced national prominence as a think tank with global reach.

2. Demand-driven and policy-relevant research positions CPD as a distinctive think tank

CPD continues to make significant strides in ensuring high-quality activities, capacity development of researchers, institutional sustainability, and smooth leadership transition. It has made substantial efforts in institutionalizing the Centre through the development of service rules, a participatory management system, retirement benefits, modern financial

management, performance-based rewarding practices, and equal opportunity practices.

CPD's overarching objective is to contribute to good governance in Bangladesh by promoting accountability and transparency and ensuring development with equity and justice. Research, dialogue and networking are instruments that CPD has used to attain this vision.

During the first few years, CPD activities included mainly organizing dialogues and discussions on macroeconomic management, governance, and donor-recipient relationships. However, the need to incorporate research was recognized early on, both as input to and outcome of the dialogue process, ensuring that research themes are identified based on felt needs.

It is at this time that the proposal for CPD's flagship research program, the Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD), was developed as a study to provide home-grown development alternatives to government and donors. With IRBD, CPD developed a tradition of preparing its own research proposals in areas that were perceived to be important from a national perspective and where CPD had the relevant competencies. With the initiation of the IRBD program, CPD consolidated its work on three pillars—research, dialogue, and outreach.

CPD has maintained a rich research portfolio which is mandated to service two complementary demands—(i) to sustain CPD's dialogue process with research-based informed inputs, and (ii) to undertake research in key areas and on critical issues which are often prioritized through the dialogue process. In identifying its research agenda, CPD has tended to focus more on issues that are policy-tailored and have policy relevance. Both strategic themes and issues of immediate relevance are taken up.

CPD's research programs cover a wide magnitude of issues—governance, economic reforms, environmental sustainability and financial sector analysis to trade-related issues in the World Trade Organization (WTO), with special emphasis on the areas of interest to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in general, and Bangladesh in particular. Issues of regional importance, particularly in such areas as trade, investment,

connectivity and trade facilitation in South Asia have also been of research interest to the CPD.

Based on CPD's experience over the years, addressing development issues holistically and with focus is essential for contributing meaningfully to a just and equitable society. Thus, CPD has aimed to undertake more rigorous research grounded in primary data, targeting issues that have direct policy implications for the welfare of the marginalized people of society.

3. Partnership has enhanced CPD's research quality and national capacity

CPD has drawn synergies from collaboration with individuals and institutions which work in similar areas. From the very beginning, CPD has strived to partner with similar organizations in implementing its research and dialogue programs. Such partnerships allow CPD to make use of expertise not available in-house, and also as a way of capacity building of CPD staff who get an opportunity to enrich themselves professionally through such collaborations, partnerships and joint research.

Thus, in implementing IRBD, trade, energy, gender empowerment and other programs, CPD has invited on board Bangladeshi scholars working in research and academic institutions in Bangladesh who have expertise in particular areas of research. Besides, CPD has invited contributions from Bangladeshi experts working abroad in various international organizations. CPD also partners with international organizations and globally renowned think tanks in implementing joint surveys, research, dialogues and conferences.

CPD gradually strengthened its networking activities and focused on strengthening cooperation in South Asia and advancing Bangladesh's interest as an LDC in various global fora, including the WTO and the UN system. CPD has also become part of global networks.

4. CPD dialogues stimulate constructive policy engagement among stakeholders

At the core of CPD's activities lies its dialogue program. CPD designs the dialogue format in such a manner that it is not just a mere exchange of rhetoric and opinion but rather promotes and stimulates constructive engagement and informed sharing of views. The dialogues are designed to come up with specific recommendations in terms of both redefining the policies and ensuring their effective implementation. These recommendations are then placed before current and prospective policymakers of the country as inputs to the policymaking process.

CPD brings together, on a regular basis, high government officials, senior agency executives, Members of the National Parliament (MPs), the business community, professionals, academics, non-government organization (NGO) activists and development partners to discuss specific policy issues in which they have relevant expertise. CPD also seeks to initiate policy dialogues with public interest groups such as trade unions, workers' organizations, women's organizations, professional associations and local community groups.

Eventually, the idea is to take this dialogue process, in cooperation with other membership organizations, to grass-roots levels, where policymakers and academics can be exposed to audiences drawn from the public who actually have to face the consequences of particular policies and may have quite plausible ideas as well as concerns about the validity of such policies.

Because of the importance of bringing together political parties to promote a consultative process for designing the reform process, it is CPD's policy to be non-partisan in its outlook and to retain independence in designing its dialogues. Such a stance has enabled CPD to bring

Because of the importance of bringing together political parties to promote a consultative process for designing the reform process, it is CPD's policy to be non-partisan in its outlook and to retain independence in designing its dialogues.

together cabinet ministers and opposition leaders around the same table even at times when these contending parties were not communicating with each other in the national parliament.

Thus, CPD dialogues are held in an environment where controversial issues may be discussed in a non-confrontational manner, and constructive solutions can be jointly explored. These initiatives of CPD to bring political leaders together have now extended over several successive political regimes.

Indeed, CPD can take credit for playing an important role in creating the tradition of multistakeholder consultations in Bangladesh. CPD dialogues provide a platform for all relevant stakeholders to engage constructively around various issues. CPD's target groups are diverse and include both policymakers and those for whom policies are designed.

5. Professional excellence and independence have been CPD's key strengths in overcoming challenges

CPD faces several challenges since it sees itself not just as a research institution but also as a think tank engaged in policy activism. Whenever CPD undertakes an assessment, including projections on GDP growth and other economic indicators it has been exposed to criticism, particularly from government policymakers.

Policymakers are not happy when their policies and policy outcomes are scrutinized. CPD also faced criticism from the private sector when it released its research findings, for example, on the banking sector crisis or living wages for the workers of the readymade garments sector. However, CPD has been able to withstand this because its research was evidence-based and analytically sound.

CPD has learned that if it is professionally competent, draws strength from networks, and maintains its independence, it can address and surmount the risks that are perhaps inevitable in its journey. In the coming years, CPD seeks to leverage its demonstrated achievements so far and consolidate itself as a center of excellence based on capacity, competence, and credibility.

6. Media has been CPD's strategic partner in navigating through its journey

CPD is strongly embedded in Bangladesh's civil society. It derives its legitimacy from its close relationship with the community of non-state actors. Citizens regard it as a credible source of analytical resources.

In implementing policy-influencing activities through a multistakeholder participatory process, CPD has developed strategic partnerships with both print and electronic media in the country. CPD views media as an important conduit for extending outreach and disseminating its research and dialogue outputs, building awareness on various policy issues, advocating for policy, and promoting informed policy debate among stakeholders.

CPD holds regular media briefings on topical issues to give comments, launch global reports of interest to Bangladeshi audiences and prepare press releases on events organized by the Centre. CPD professionals collaborate with the print and electronic media to provide comments through interviews and by writing short write-ups and editorials. Senior CPD researchers also give interviews in international media. Since 2006, CPD's comments on the National Budget provided at media briefings have been telecast live on television in partnership with television channels.

7. CPD will continue to articulate the concerns of the people of Bangladesh and work for a just society

CPD sees itself not just as a research institute, but as a think tank deeply invested in the future of Bangladesh. Therefore, CPD has been vocal in identifying the inherent weaknesses of the growth model pursued by the dictatorial Awami League government for more than 15 years.

This independent position created challenges for CPD in implementing its activities as it did for many non-government organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) during the previous government. Indeed, political polarization in Bangladesh has significantly impacted the regulatory environment for NGOs and CSOs. Over the past decades, the country has witnessed a decline in policymakers' tolerance of objective

criticism, leading to the use of new laws as a censorship tool. The remit of the NGO Affairs Bureau, the institution that regulates NGO activities, has been strengthened, posing challenges for NGOs and CSOs.

While the vigilance of regulatory bodies is crucial for ensuring transparency and accountability of NGO and CSO activities, the bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining clearance certificates often lead to delays. These regulations were often politically motivated to undermine specific organizations, creating an environment that hinders the development of a culture of free thinking and free academic practices. This underscores the need for streamlined processes and efficient governance.

Following the ousting of the autocratic government on 5 August 2024 by a student-led mass uprising, Bangladesh is pursuing the difficult task of improving its macroeconomic stability by bringing discipline and raising efficiency in economic management under the Interim Government. In addition to addressing the immediate issues, Bangladesh will have to work in several areas such as improving the competitiveness of her economy, enhancing productivity, developing sustainable infrastructure, participating in regional and global value chains, addressing climate change induced challenges, and mitigating economic and social inequalities in the short to medium term.

All along, CPD has articulated concerns over the deteriorating socio-economic situation of Bangladesh. CPD has suggested reforms since economic vulnerabilities have been visible through the poor performance of all important sectors and increasing inequality due to a lack of good governance, accountability, transparency and the rule of law. CPD will continue to contribute to Bangladesh's institutional and policy reform efforts in establishing an equitable and just society.

Tributes from the Well-wishers

A Personal Reflection on Three Decades of Engagement with Centre for Policy Dialogue

It is hardly a pathbreaking revelation that Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) precedes its reputation. However, this resonates more practically with someone like me having spent about a decade in think tank setting having been involved in South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) in different capacities since its inception.

Although I had already heard of good work done by CPD, my first in-person encounter with the face of CPD was at the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva in 1998, when I met the then Executive Director of the organization *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya*. What started as a professional engagement turned into a lasting friendship, not only with *Deb* but also with other colleagues, such as *Mustafiz* and *Fahmida*, among others. Not surprisingly, we had many things in common, including, but not limited to, advancing the least developed countries' (LDCs) interests and priorities in the multilateral trading system; witnessing rapid regional integration in South Asia; and attracting more and better finances in the LDCs in general and in South Asian LDCs in particular to help them achieve their development aspirations. Indeed, we are bound together by a common objective of creating a level playing field for the LDCs in the global economic, social and environmental landscape.



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Executive Director

Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF)

Another important occasion when I had a full day of interaction with Deb and other like-minded colleagues was at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Civil Society Dialogue on selected development issues being addressed by the United Nations system held in Geneva on 10 December 2001. At that time, I was pursuing my Master of International Law and Economics (MILE) degree at the World Trade Institute, Bern. The session, most fittingly chaired by Deb, came up with a ten-point agenda on strengthening the mandate of UNCTAD, among which points, public health gender and financing for development remained relevant in today's context.

Later in my career, I visited Dhaka in more capacities than one. In 2005, I took up a position of a Programme Specialist at the United Nations Development Programme Regional Centre in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to manage a project aimed at helping four Asian LDCs (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Nepal) in export diversification in the context of phasing out textile and clothing quotas at the WTO. In my first mission to Dhaka, meeting Deb, Mustafiz and Fahmida was one of the first things I did not only to understand the reality on the ground, but also to gauge CPD's interest in becoming a national partner for the implementation of the Bangladesh component of the project.

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When I returned to Kathmandu and rejoined SAWTEE as its President, I fondly remember having jointly initiated the South Asia Economic Summit as a mini-Davos in August 2008, together with the CPD and other like-minded organizations, under the able leadership of our dear friend late Dr Saman Kelegama. The summit also provided a platform for interactions with CPD colleagues on several occasions.

Then came a time when I returned to my academic pursuits, and this is when I chose to do a comparative analysis of Aid for Trade (AfT) in Bangladesh and Nepal to assess the effectiveness of aid for trade in addressing critical supply-side constraints facing these countries. In September 2009, when I spent nearly two weeks interviewing experts from various walks of life in Dhaka, CPD was again one of the first places I visited.

In May 2012, SAWTEE organized a High-Level Dialogue on Linking the Istanbul Plan of Action with the Post-2015 Development Framework in Kathmandu, where Mustafiz as the then Executive Director of CPD made a powerful presentation on the *Southern Voice* in the Post-2015 Development Framework from the LDCs' Perspective. During this presentation, he made an impassioned plea for the Post-2015 Development Framework to focus on economic growth promoting initiatives, which could have a significant spillover impact on social indicators while promoting employment opportunities. This view was also echoed by the then Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, who spoke afterwards.

In 2013, when SAWTEE initiated a project to conduct trade facilitation audit in South Asia with the support of the then Australian Aid, CPD was chosen as the partner for the implementation of the project in Bangladesh. However, I could not manage to oversee the full implementation of the project as I moved to Geneva to take up my current role as the Executive Director of the Executive Secretariat of the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) at the WTO.

Our engagement continued in the past ten years since I joined the EIF, albeit on a limited scale, of which I recall five such occasions.

First, the EIF engaged Deb as the lead consultant for preparing a paper on *The Role of the EIF in the Context of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the LDCs and the Post-2015 International Development Agenda*. The study, among other things, contributed to the design of EIF Phase Two, which started in 2016 and is expected to conclude in June 2024.

Second, I have not missed any opportunity to meet and interact with CPD colleagues every time I visited Dhaka for my regular missions to Bangladesh, where we have provided AfT support to conduct analytical studies, such as the Diagnostic Trade Integration Study (DTIS), which was recently updated in 2023; create an institutional structure to mainstream trade and implement priority actions emanating from the DTIS and its update; and enhance competitiveness and diversify exports of three critical sectors—high end readymade garments, pharmaceuticals and processed fruits.

On one such occasion, I was privileged to have been invited to deliver a talk on the Fourth Industrial Revolution and Implications for the LDCs at CPD in March 2018. During the talk, I had an opportunity explain how governments, the private sector, development partners and civil society can work together to enhance accessibility, affordability and application of Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies in South Asian LDCs. During the Q&A session, I received intriguing questions and useful insights from colleagues as varied as Mustafiz, Fahmida, Moazzem and Towfiq.

Third, at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the EIF held a fully virtual EIF Steering Committee meeting and wanted to have someone from an Asian think tank to share the findings of their research on the plight of women entrepreneurs in the LDCs, who were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, I approached Fahmida, and she kindly accepted to join the panel. Her intervention, which focused on digital financial inclusion for Bangladeshi women, was highly appreciated by the participants of the EIF Steering Committee.

Fourth, I was fortunate to have contributed to the CPD-Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) sponsored virtual dialogue on *Trade in Services in the Digital Age* on 19 July 2021 as one of the panellists. While my intervention focused on making digital services trade more inclusive, the theme paper presented at the session as well as interventions from panellists from Bangladesh, South Asia and various international organizations were extremely valuable to broaden my knowledge and understanding of the issue.

Finally, in the run-up to the United Nations Least Developed Countries Conference in Doha in March 2023, the second preparatory committee meeting was organized virtually. On 28 July 2021, the EIF, the UN Technology Bank for LDCs and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization joined hands to organize a virtual side event titled *Technology as a driver for structural transformation in LDCs* on 28 July 2021. Fahmida was again invited as a panellist to present her perspective, and she shared her observations on how Bangladesh was able to utilize digital technology to achieve structural transformation.

In the end, here is what I would like to say about CPD: While the academic excellence, policy advocacy credibility and networking capacity of CPD are undoubtedly remarkable, one thing I am particularly impressed with is its succession plan. Having witnessed a smooth transfer of leadership from Deb to Mustafiz to Fahmida with the outgoing leaders continuing to actively contribute to strengthen the organization, I truly believe that this is something many others in South Asia and elsewhere need to learn from CPD.

Our Debt to CPD

It is a distinct pleasure and a high privilege to congratulate CPD on its 30th anniversary. It is an opportunity to express our deep appreciation and gratitude for all it has already achieved, and convey our warm wishes and support for all that it is destined to accomplish in the future.

That effusiveness is based on several considerations. First, CPD has gathered some of the most richly credentialed and respected economists and social scientists in the country (Doctors Rounaq Jahan, Debapriya Bhattacharyya, *Fahmida Khatun*, *Mustafizur Rahman*, *Golam Moazzem*, among many others) who have established a formidable presence in the intellectual and policy landscape of the country. The redoubtable personality of *Professor Rehman Sobhan* with his own fierce patriotism, his progressive visions, his organizational skills, his international reputation, his personal grace, dedication, integrity, work ethic, and solicitude, and the collegial but demanding work environment he has shaped, has encouraged an extraordinary level of discipline, excellence, and productivity in CPD's team of "engaged intellectuals".

Second, CPD has consistently pressed for "development" that is more comprehensive, sustainable, and equitable. It has emphasized "quality of life" issues not merely in terms of eliminating corruption, containing ecological destruction, or eradicating government inefficiency, but



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also ensuring human rights, civil liberties, economic justice, public health and, particularly for women and minorities, safety and inclusiveness.

This is different from the usual, convenient, and sometimes misleading focus on “growth” preferred by “mainstream economists”, and usually the Government in power. Typically, they reference some select indicators e.g., GNP growth rate, per capita income, life expectancy, export performance, forex reserves, remittances, foreign investments, and some dazzling mega projects.

CPD has never ignored or belittled the second. But it has consistently and resolutely maintained that those measures cannot be the only criteria for judging the sense of overall well-being and satisfaction experienced by the people.

Third, CPD has been able to secure Bangladesh’s place in the circuit of international discussions in relevant areas, where our position has been expressed with clarity and authority, and accorded due recognition and reinforcement. Its pioneering role in terms of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Bangladesh’s journey towards graduating from its LDC status, bears eloquent testimony to its stature and efficacy. Moreover, it has been active in international and regional meetings and conferences and has invited many world-renowned experts to its own initiatives.

While this exposure, and the links forged therein, have been essential to the broadening of our horizons, the flowering of our talents and the building of our collective scholarly confidence, it has also made it possible for CPD to explore diverse funding sources for its institutional and operational needs, and strengthened its autonomy in terms of avoiding usual donor pressures.

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Fourth, CPD has not limited itself to functioning only within the narrow boundaries of disinterested research and publication. It has been involved in a variety of programs and engagements both in terms of policy advocacy on specific socio-economic issues, as well as emphasizing the centrality of the “people”, particularly those traditionally “left behind”, as the real stake holders in its priorities and prerogatives.

To that end it has arranged citizen’s forums and workshops in which those living in villages and mofussil areas could present the real problems and concerns that affect their lives and livelihoods; brought government administrators, political leaders (of various persuasions), civil society campaigners, NGO personnel, representatives of professional bodies, as well as educationists of different specializations into these discussions; and given voice to a variety of subaltern groups usually overlooked in the dominant political culture (members of minority groups, LGBTQ communities, indigenous peoples, garment workers, unemployed youths, and so on).

These efforts to bring disparate groups and interests together where all could participate, question, warn, defend, demand, complain, reject, advise, or promote without fear or pressure, were undoubtedly bold and novel. The exercise also exposed the moral vacuity and the administrative authoritarianism typical of South Asia’s ruling elite through pointedly reminding everyone that policies for the “public good” can never be meaningful when most of the people are silenced, made invisible, or considered irrelevant.

Finally, CPD’s activist orientations were never allowed to compromise the regularity, rigor, or liveliness of its scholarly agenda. Its most significant and enduring contribution has been its adherence to the imperatives of substantive and objective research following universal principles of scientific methodology, relying on empirical evidence, and applying the laws of logical reasoning. This is quite remarkable in an intellectual climate marked by indifference, at times hostility, to scholarly ambitions or projects.

Some examples will suffice. In universities, research is not incentivized either in the resources allocated to it, or in the value attached to it (usually

not consequential in hiring or promotion decisions). Faculty members, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, seldom publish in peer-reviewed international platforms, and have not displayed much eagerness to improve the quality of the journals that all Universities must publish (as required by the University Grants Commission). It is largely (though not exclusively) because of the barrenness in our fields of research that our higher education institutions are “punished” in global rankings.

Furthermore, major publishers tend to ignore research (except for UPL). Thus, according to Bangla Academy sources, out of approximately 3000 new titles introduced in the Boi Mela celebrations in February last year, less than 3% were research based. Similarly, the total number of books published by Dhaka University Press over the last 20 years been less than 65.

What has contributed to intensifying these research-averse attitudes in the public, is an increasingly aggressive political mindset that seeks to impose established narratives and “given truths” which cannot be interrogated let alone contradicted. Obviously, this generates a “chilling effect” on free speech as well as academic enquiry.

Moreover, the prevalent social tastes and practices tend to valorize opinionating and verbal agility over substance and expertise. For example, “public intellectuals” elsewhere first become respected because of their seminal contributions in some specific category and THEN offer their views on selective contemporary issues as respected and thoughtful elders (Bertrand Russel, Noam Chomsky, Edward Said, Amartya Sen, Slavoj Zizek, Romila Thapar, Paul Krugman etc). But here, with a few notable exceptions, that status is acquired by people famous for their ability to hold forth on a variety of topics with equal, if facile, glibness. Sen’s “argumentative Indian” is alive and well, indeed flourishing in Bangladesh today and, perversely, serves to distract and disrupt its scholarly potentials.

CPD’s ability to “keep its eyes on the prize”, to “keep the faith”, to keep true to its original mandate and focus, has been audacious and inspiring. It has demonstrated that research can be meaningful, relevant, and

respected, and intellectuals have a duty and a responsibility to ensure that their identity as scholars is not defined by talk show chatter, hurried op-ed pieces, and brief “performances” as discussants in crowded stages.

Through its strenuous and determined efforts, CPD has elevated the scholarly discourse by its insistence on informed analysis, theoretical sophistication, and logical conclusions. It has created a tradition, set an example, and established a legacy. Because of that, we stand proud, enlightened, and indebted.

Thank you CPD!!!

CPD at 30
*CPD's Journey through
Bangladesh's Socio-Political Landscape*

A think tank, as a group of scholars whose profession is to read, write, research and discuss topics which are important to promote social good, has a particularly challenging and vital role in an era of a looming existential crisis facing humanity and the planet (the UN Secretary General warns of the beginning of 'climate breakdown' in 2023). Not to be ignored are rising authoritarianism and loss of faith in democracy, and regression of the values of diversity of culture and plural human identities. The conditions that bestow critical functions to a think tank and define its tasks also stand as formidable obstacles to doing its job. The well-known UK think tank Chatham House concluded in a recent event about its role, "Not only must the work of think tanks help counter political uncertainty but that uncertainty often threatens their ability to work effectively, and in some cases, their survival" (Chatham House Members' Event Panel, 9 May 2023).

The United States has over 2,200 think tanks, more than double since 1980. As they generate new ideas for policymaking, assess existing policies, and draw attention to neglected issues, an inherent risk is that "policymakers will seek out think tank views that validate, rather than question, paths that have been predetermined or already taken. .writes Stephen J. Del Rosso of Carnegie Corporation (Policy Brief Beyond



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Unhelpful Metaphors: The Influence of Think Tanks on U.S. Foreign and National Security Policy, 8 November, 2021).

In explaining its genesis, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) said it was established in 1993 with the vision of creating an inclusive society based on equity, justice, fairness and good governance. To realize that vision, the objectives it set for itself were: To enhance national capacity for economy-wide policy analysis; foster regional cooperation in key areas such as poverty alleviation, trade, investment and connectivity; and facilitate Bangladesh's effective integration into the process of globalization.

CPD came into being at a time when, a mass movement of the people had ended the military-backed authoritarian rule in Bangladesh, then in power since the assassination of Bangabandhu in 1975; and an elected government was restored in 1991. The hopes of the nation were pinned on a consensus reached among democratic forces in course of the mass movement to ensure people's representation through free and fair parliamentary elections under a caretaker government, strengthening parliamentary democracy, and restoring the guiding principles in the declaration of independence and the original constitution of Bangladesh, before it suffered disfiguring dissection by the military-backed regimes. The founder of CPD, *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, envisaged a vital role for the think tank in contributing to the revival and realization of the dream of a progressive, inclusive, just and prosperous Bangladesh. He sought to establish a platform for engagement of stakeholders in the process of identifying priorities and strategies and shaping policies and ensuring their implementation.

CPD's programs and activities bear testimony to the lofty ambitions it has harboured for itself. Its flagship programme *Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD)* has been providing every year an un-blinkered view of the nation's economic and social development and indicating sign posts for change in direction where needed. CPD has also partnered with research institutions and agencies of global acclaim in priorities they share. For example, in partnership with the World Economic Forum (WEF), CPD has been preparing the Bangladesh chapter of the Global Competitiveness Report (GCR) since 2001.

In the three decades since its birth, CPD has earned an international name, especially, in addressing regional and global policymaking in the Global South context through strategic partnerships. How has it done in realizing its national objectives and serving the national needs?

An objective critique of Bangladesh's progress in social and economic development in the last three decades would merit highlighting progress in important areas. These include robust GDP growth, mitigation of extreme poverty, infrastructure development, progress in several basic social indicators, and eliminating gender gap in access to basic education. These are no mean achievements by any measure. A small geographically constrained country with a large population (eighth largest in the world) treading a geopolitical tight rope, while surrounded by or in proximity to large and powerful neighbours should itself count as a success.

At the same time, areas of challenges have compromised the character of the advances made and prevented sharing of the benefits of economic growth by all citizens. Income inequality continues to grow, the brunt of it borne by populations marginalized by socio-economic status, geography, ethnicity and personal characteristics such as disability. Governance failure and corruption with impunity and a norm of tolerance of these infractions have marred progress in all sectors of national development and public services. Crony capitalism has captured large parts of the financial and banking operations. Energy, industry, infrastructure and investment policies and decisions have failed to do enough to adopt a path of renewable energy and sustainable production and consumption. Bangladesh remains one of the most climate-vulnerable counties in the world and the effects are tangibly visible.

It has been largely a disappointing story in respect of human capacity and skills building through the education system. A concerted effort based on a work-plan has not been made to implement the national education policy adopted in 2010. A comprehensive sector plan for an inclusive, equitable and quality basic education for all children and youth, as envisaged in SDG4, does not exist—a visible failure of leadership and political commitment. Transformative change in this respect is vital to realize the nation's aspiration of reaching a higher middle income status and joining the ranks of developed countries by 2041.

Arguably, the political parties that inherited power from the previous military regime and have ruled the country since 1991 have not fulfilled the expectations arising from the restoration of democracy. The retrograde trends unleashed by the military rulers left a legacy and culture of authoritarianism, lack of accountability and corruption, and taking advantage of divisive forces in society. These trends persisted and in some sense became more entrenched under political governments. Most importantly, the consensus reached for public representation by free and fair elections unraveled and a new dispensation acceptable to all has not been found. The political conundrum has negatively affected policy and priority-setting in national development and their follow-through as noted above.

CPD has been at the receiving end of both brickbats and bouquets, more of the former from some of the partisan and influential supporters of the regime. This is a think tank's fate; but it is necessary for itself and the people of the country to persist in its path, as the country faces new risks and possibilities.

CPD has attempted diligently and objectively to call the shots as it saw these, projecting advances made and, more importantly, pointing out potentials unrealized and opportunities missed. It has provided a platform, as foreseen in its mission, for stakeholders to voice their concerns and expectations. For its pains, CPD has been at the receiving end of both brickbats and bouquets, more of the former from some of the partisan and influential supporters of the regime. This is a think tank's fate; but it is necessary for itself and the people of the country to persist in its path, as the country faces new risks and possibilities. Despite an increasing devaluation of expertise in public discourse, good policymaking is not possible without it.

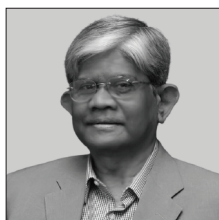
I hope that both admirers and detractors of CPD will appreciate the value of the role it can play and the contribution it can make in the next three decades.

Centre for Policy Dialogue *An Organization with a Difference*

The Centre for Policy Dialogue, more popularly known as CPD, is a well-known name among academicians, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in Bangladesh and abroad. For the last couple of decades, CPD has been doing useful work in development. Its works encompass economic issues, social issues, political issues, and ethical and normative issues. Needless to say, all these issues are vital for socio-economic development and for improving the quality of life of people. It is said “Man does not live by bread alone”. The array of needs of the human being covers material and non-material needs. CPD’s works aptly cover all these aspects. I have been keenly reading the publications of CPD. I participated in several policy dialogues of CPD as a resource person and as a discussant. The quality, relevance, and authenticity of their observations and data are immensely beneficial.

CPD, as a think tank, has served well the needs of various stakeholders, as mentioned earlier. The flagship publications of CPD, like the “Independent Review of Bangladesh Development (IRBD)”, are very well-researched and well-articulated documents. This periodic publication is very useful for policymakers, donor agencies, academicians, and various public, private, and non-government organisations.

Every year, CPD brings out a review of the macroeconomic management of the government of Bangladesh and provides recommendations as



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inputs for the budget, and it is done before the budget is prepared. After the government presents the budget, CPD formally, in an open forum, gives reactions to the budget. This two-stage work of CPD is a unique feature. CPD has been working on political and governance issues as well. One may not see eye to eye with CPD's various publications, but one must agree that CPD's works provide independent and objective views on various contemporary issues of Bangladesh and other developing countries.

Policymaking is a complex process. Especially the government policies, which affect government machineries, private organisations, non-government organisations, and finally the people. Therefore, an organisation working with policy issues should deal with data and information and its analyses. Policy to be evidence-based has to take account of data and its proper analysis. "Policymaking is a matter of science and art," it is said. That is exactly what CPD does.

In a country like Bangladesh, convincing policymakers is not an easy task. The politicians and bureaucrats often show suspicions about the works of think tanks like CPD. Challenges abound before CPD, from policymakers, donors, and other stakeholders. CPD is well poised to answer queries and counter arguments to vindicate its position.

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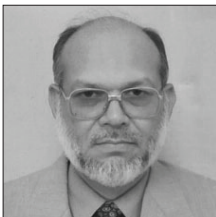
Honoring 30 Years of CPD *Celebrating a Legacy of Impactful Policy Research and Development for Bangladesh's Future*

Congratulations to CPD on 30 years of impactful policy research and development. Your commitment to Bangladesh's growth and prosperity is truly commendable.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) is a prominent think tank and research organization that plays a pivotal role in shaping policy discussions and decisions in Bangladesh. My observations, experiences, and perspectives on CPD's activities have highlighted its significant impact on the country's socio-economic development.

CPD's research activities are at the heart of its influence. The organization conducts in-depth studies on a wide range of topics, including economic policies, governance, social issues, and sustainable development. These research endeavors are often the basis for evidence-based policymaking in Bangladesh. In my experience, CPD's reports and policy briefs have been instrumental in initiating informed discussions among policymakers, academics, and civil society organizations.

One of the most commendable aspects of CPD's work is its commitment to transparency and independence. Over the years, I have observed that CPD maintains a high level of integrity in its research and policy advocacy. This credibility has earned CPD a reputation as a trusted



Kazi Rafiqul Alam
President and Chief Executive
Dhaka Ahsania Mission

source of information and analysis. Policymakers, international organizations, and the media often turn to CPD for unbiased insights and recommendations.

CPD's activities extend beyond research. The organization actively engages with various stakeholders through seminars, workshops, and conferences. These events serve as platforms for dialogue and knowledge exchange. In my perspective, CPD's efforts to foster collaboration and open discussions have contributed to the development of a vibrant policy ecosystem in Bangladesh.

Furthermore, CPD's advocacy for inclusive and sustainable development has been particularly impactful. The organization has consistently advocated for policies that address issues such as poverty alleviation, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. Through its research and advocacy, CPD has influenced policies that have had a positive impact on marginalized communities in Bangladesh.

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Another noteworthy aspect of CPD's work is its focus on capacity building. CPD conducts training programs and workshops aimed at enhancing the analytical and research skills of young professionals and researchers. In my observation, these capacity-building initiatives have contributed to the growth of a more informed and skilled workforce in Bangladesh.

CPD's international collaborations and partnerships have also been instrumental in broadening its influence. The organization collaborates with international research institutions and participates in global policy dialogues. This international engagement has enabled CPD to bring global perspectives and best practices to the forefront of policy discussions in Bangladesh.

In my experience, CPD's activities have a ripple effect on the country's overall development. Its research-driven policy recommendations have the potential to drive positive change in areas such as economic growth, education, healthcare, and governance. Moreover, CPD's advocacy for evidence-based policymaking contributes to a culture of informed decisionmaking in Bangladesh.

In conclusion, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has established itself as a key player in Bangladesh's policy landscape. Its research, advocacy, and capacity-building initiatives have a far-reaching impact on the country's socio-economic development. CPD's commitment to transparency, independence, and inclusivity make it a trusted source of information and a catalyst for positive change. As I reflect on my observations and experiences, it is clear that CPD's activities are instrumental in shaping a more prosperous and equitable future for Bangladesh.

Thanking you.

A Tribute to CPD's Vision and Enduring Impact on South Asia's Economic Policy Landscape

At a U.N. Workshop some 30 years ago in Dhaka at Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), I learnt that the foundations were being laid to setup a Centre for Economic Policy Studies for South Asia (SACEPS). Economists from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Maldives were invited and I was asked to be a member of the Executive Board and to be their main contact in Pakistan.

There was discussion as to where the permanent headquarter should be. I suggested Delhi: the Ford Foundation provided some funding, and SACEPS was initially set up in New Delhi, where it was hosted by the Centre for Policy Research (CPR). We wanted the same protocol from the Government of India as was given to an international organization. The Government of India declined to give SACEPS such a status, where its foreign employees pay no taxes, and money coming into the organization from international sources is tax exempt. The Government of India didn't accept our request so we moved SACEPS to CPD in Dhaka.

The mandate of SACEPS was to write policy papers to promote economic activity between the SAARC countries. Papers written by CPD scholars and experts such as Dr. Rahmatullah contributed much to make SACEPS more effective. For example, there was a paper on open transportation systems in the SAARC countries; another to find a way for Pakistani



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trucks and trains to go to Dhaka and for their truck and trains to come to Pakistan; for the free movement of goods between Sri Lanka, Nepal, India and Bhutan etc. The papers looked to the benefits as well as the negative aspects. A paper on custom duties was also available. We had economists from universities in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan. They wrote papers on various projects. International funding was then available because of interest for promoting harmony among our countries.

Centre for Policy Dialogue played a pivotal role under the leadership of its Founder *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, not only in nurturing SACEPS but providing a home in CPD in Dhaka in its early days. Through SACEPS later life in Nepal *Professor Rehman Sobhan* continued to attend its meetings to contribute to its deliberations.

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A Message

Celebrating Thirty Years of CPD's Journey

I congratulate CPD for being a beacon of knowledge to Bangladesh and the South Asia region. May it continue to contribute to the prosperity of the people of the area.

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) since its establishment in 1993, has successfully evolved as the most credible and reputed think tank institution in Bangladesh. CPD has earned such a reputation by generating knowledge, thought-provoking and thought-informed debate on relevant and contemporary policy issues and through dialogue.

CPD's rich contribution to enhancing national capacity for macro and micro economic policy analyses, foster regional cooperation in key areas such as trade and investment, has facilitated Bangladesh's efforts for effective integration into the globalization process. The high quality research reports of CPD have not only contributed to the national interest but also addressed the interests and concerns of South Asian countries.

Bangladesh at present has an unprecedented upsurge of young people in its demographic milieu. Keeping that in view, CPD has stepped in to implement the Leadership Programme, targeting the youth to promote development vision and policy awareness amongst the young people of Bangladesh.



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CPD's efforts to support research-related capacity building in the country to enable researchers, academics and representatives of various stakeholder groups has been laudatory. CPD's regular publications and webposts, Books, Monographs, Working Papers, Dialogue Reports, Policy Briefs are recognized as credible and worthy resource base. Being an academic and researcher, I myself, my colleagues and students are all grateful to CPD for further enhancing the quality of our research by providing data, information and other rich empirical resources.

CPD is active and visible in civic activism through concrete initiatives including knowledge generation, policy research and analysis. CPD also has been engaged in developing networking, dialogue, information dissemination and mobilizing civil society support for various policy agenda.

CPD's public dialogues are extensively reported by the print and electronic media in Bangladesh that leaves a solid footprint of CPD's quality and professionalism. Over the years, CPD has reached a position as one of the most credible global think tanks by initiating, leading and contributing in various programs, policy discourses on a various national and regional issues. The credible pool of CPD researchers have been relentlessly contributing to various important issues related to economic policy and social development issues of the country. It is heartening to see that the CPD has also been recognized as one of the most credible think tanks in South Asian context.

As an academic and researcher, I am indeed proud of CPD for its contributions to the national and international stream of knowledge in macroeconomic management, development discourse and the broad spectrum of governance and public policy. I, on behalf of the academia and my students warmly applaud CPD for enriching us for three decades through its research and policy appreciation. My heartiest congratulations to CPD on stepping in to its 30 years and I wish all the success in its glorious journey for the years to come.

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30 Years of CPD

A “Think Tank” That Has Given Us a Lot to Think About

I remember a year or two after we launched The Daily Star in January 1991, under S.M. Ali’s leadership, *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, ‘Sir’ to us all, called me to a temporary office in Mohammadpur—I think it belonged to Gana Shahajjya Sangstha (GSS)—and told me about his plans to start a think tank which would be named Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

It took me quite a while to fully appreciate the significance of Sir’s plan. My initial reaction was: Why set up a ‘dialogue’ platform, which to me, meant basically a “talk shop”? The Daily Star was already holding roundtables for that very purpose.

But like the great ‘Teacher’ that he is, he saw the real need of the time, something that I totally failed to grasp—the need for intellectual discourse between opposing groups in a calm, mutually respectful and logical environment. In a society where ‘dialogue’ very seldom took place and where any exchange of views quickly deteriorated into personal attack and name calling and where ‘talking at each other’ was given far more importance than ‘talking to each other’, setting up a genuine platform for dialogue was a very insightful step indeed.

By creating the CPD, *Professor Sobhan* was trying to bring about a cultural shift in our intellectual behaviour and in our thinking process.



Mahfuz Anam
Editor and Publisher
The Daily Star

He was setting up something that would make us respect facts over unsubstantiated opinion, expose us to the fundamental need for research, implant in our minds that a nation, however cohesive, is never monolithic and for society to make progress it must constantly exchange views with all its components. Most importantly, policymakers must be made to listen to the people, held accountable and, when necessary, challenged. Not only has CPD performed this crucial duty very professionally, it did so uninterrupted over the last 30 years, making us realize what an invaluable institution Sir had set up, steered, guided and protected from infantile attacks from powers that be.

As someone who has followed CPD's march forward with regularity and focus, I see the following stages of its evolution. It started as a platform of exchange of views in the form of holding dialogues. Then it moved to research in order to make that dialogue more fact based rather than perception or prejudice based. As the exchange of views became substantive due to its research, CPD moved forward to agenda setting—meaning, presenting before the public in general and policymakers in particular, the issues that needed to be addressed as priorities. This brought CPD into the more challenging domain of greater interaction with the public and finding out what people's priorities were.

The 'agenda' setting effort saw its most dramatic manifestation in the formation of a *Nagorik Committee* in 2006 (Citizens' Committee) to create an agenda for the election scheduled to be held in 2007. With *Professor Rehman Sobhan* as the Convener and in collaboration with Prothom Alo, Channel i and The Daily Star and CPD serving as the secretariat, the Citizens Committee decided to prepare a "citizens' vision" for Bangladesh bringing forth "key medium term strategic goals" through a hitherto unprecedented process of directly talking to large segments of voters. To prepare this vision, a total of 15 regional dialogues were held, spread all over the country. A total of 8,000 people attended, with about 1,500 actively participating in them. These participants represented almost all professional groups, civil society bodies, business chambers, trade unions, sports associations, shop owners groups, peasant/farmers' bodies, rickshaw pullers associations, etc. and of course, all major political parties.

CPD and its team deserves full credit for undertaking this massive engagement with citizens—probably the first ever and never again—which really brought together, perhaps the largest cross section of citizens and provided them with an opportunity to have an input in creating a national agenda. They could say to their favored political party what they wanted from its leaders.

Following these dialogues and many expert group meetings on specific themes, CPD brought out, in August 2007, “Bangladesh Vision 2021” (Bangladesh Rupakalpa 2021, in Bangla) a 15-year-plan (from 2007-2021) to make Bangladesh advance towards a lower middle income country. The “Vision” had eight goals, dealing with democracy, accountable and decentralized governance, poverty, health, creative human resource, regional economic hub, sustainable environment and equitable society. To achieve these goals, 85 actionable recommendations were put forward. All in all, the “Vision” was a comprehensive plan of action for any government to undertake. After its publication and well before the election, a special function was held, during which the “Vision” was formally handed over to AL and BNP secretary generals—Abul Jalil and Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan—to help them formulate their respective election manifestos.

I have elaborated the “Vision 2021” activity of *Nagorik Committee* in some details for two reasons—one, to show the enormity of the task that CPD had the courage to undertake and two, to show how the brilliance of the whole effort remained mostly ignored as both sides made no effort to understand the timeliness of the effort, the richness of the findings, the all encompassing nature of its vision and the political and economic relevance of its recommendations. All got lost because of the ingrained and habitual suspicion of our political parties, especially of the top two, towards anything that they do not author themselves. Though the AL had the wisdom to take some key suggestions contained in the “Vision” it never acknowledged it and, instead, mocked the whole process and attributed all kinds of political motives to it.

It was a repeat of what happened with the Task Force reports in 1991, the first caretaker (called ‘interim’) government under President Shahabuddin. As one of its advisors, *Professor Rehman Sobhan* had

undertaken to bequeath a detailed plan of action for the government which would be the first democratic one after the takeover of the government by the military. Sir set up a total 29 Task Forces assigning each a particular sector of our economy and tasking them to bring together a set of research-based action programs for the advancement of the country, which was set to return to democracy after 16 years of military autocratic rule. He completed the multi-volume Task Force Reports that would have been a treasure trove for any thinking government. The reports were all produced exclusively by Bangladeshi scholars, all of whom worked pro bono and toiled for days and months voluntarily and without the involvement of any external consultants which was the common practice of the day. It was the largest coming together of Bangladeshi experts to produce a “Vision”. Such was the magnetism, prestige and convening power of *Professor Rehman Sobhan*. Khaleda Zia’s government, that came to power in 1991, reportedly, never even looked at them let alone implement its findings.

Now the AL government, in 2008, did the same and went a step further. It made a mockery of the whole effort.

It is my considered view that CPD is by far, the most successful ‘Think Tank’ in the history of Bangladesh and perhaps a trendsetter globally, for its quality, consistency and courage. It never shied away from exposing claims no matter who made it and who it may offend. Usually Think Tanks stay away from political parties but CPD engaged with them, especially to create some fact based dialogue between our two bitterest political rivals, namely the AL and the BNP. Though it may seem unbelievable now, the AL and BNP regularly attended many discussions at the secretary general level convened by CPD.

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Its annual ‘State of the Economy’ reviews stands out as the most professionally produced report in the private sector in terms of its rigor and substance. It perhaps holds a global record for doing it so consistently and with such impeccable quality for the last three decades. Few think tanks in the world could match this performance. CPD’s annual budget review is unquestionably the most authentic and reliable budget analysis to which the people look forward today.

The most recent initiative to set up a “Citizens’ Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh”, is another stunningly successful example of the organization’s ability to constantly reinvent itself, remain relevant and reflect the aspirations of the people. Through this initiative, of which it serves as the secretariat, it has gone closer to the very bottom of the social strata. In reflecting the SDG philosophy of “Leave no one behind” CPD is proving that policy formulation, if based on pro-people research, can really touch the most marginalized people.

One of its most creative initiative has been its engagement with the media. Through a very close interaction CPD taught us, the journalists, the value of research and educated us about the complexity of the social and economic challenges that the country faced. In return we gladly and generously helped to raise mass awareness of the same issues that it brought out into the public domain.

Congratulations to CPD on its 30th anniversary.

CPD 30 Years and Counting!

What can one write about an organization founded by no other than *Professor Rehman Sobhan*. For 30 years his vision, keen intellect and ability to speak truth to power has steered the Centre for Policy Dialogue to it being recognized as the unrivalled think tank in the country. CPD's credibility has been earned by the high standard of research and evidence-based reports as the pillar on which it proudly stands today. It now enjoys the respect and admiration of policymakers (even those who disagree with them) and a wide range of civil society groups.

There are so many aspects of CPD's contribution that one can admire. The Task force Reports of 1991, setting up of the *Nagorik Committee* in 2006 which culminated in the Bangladesh Vision 2021 document, holding regular dialogues by bringing policymakers and concerned civil society individuals face to face to debate issues of national importance, are only a few of those. Coming from the NGO sector and running an organization for the last 20 years, for me there are three aspects of CPD that I have come to admire the most.

One, producing such brilliant researchers and professionals. Each one of them, starting from *Debapriya Bhattacharya* to *Mustafizur Rahman* to *Fahmida Khatun* and more recently *Towfiq* and *Moazzam* have each made an indelible mark on the research landscape of Bangladesh. Their



Shaheen Anam
Executive Director
Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF)

knowledge, scholarship and dedication to produce work of the highest quality is admired and recognized nationally as well as globally. Not to forget Fatema Yousuf who retired two years ago. She was responsible for organizing the policy dialogues so efficiently which has been the hallmark of CPD and the main reason for its creation 30 years ago.

I have often wondered what it is about this organization that everyone associated with it attains a formidable reputation? The answer is perhaps the insistence on excellence, rigor and an attitude of no compromise on quality of work. It must also be mentoring by the seniors led indeed by *Professor Rehman Sobhan*.

The second is the culture of succession at the top executive positions. CPD stands out as one-of-a-kind organization in this respect. In an environment where organizations, especially in the NGO sector, are known by the founder who continues to stay in that position till voluntary retirement, CPD stands out as perhaps one of the very few where there is change of leadership on a regular basis and making way for younger, diverse and equally capable persons. I have posed this question to them and the answer was “we prepare for it right after a change of leadership takes place”. Therefore, succession is planned years in advance, and a process of skill transfer, mentoring and coaching is set in place for the potential candidate. Everyone who took over after *Rehman Sobhan* Sir gave up the ED’s position remaining the Chairperson had big shoes to fill. However, each one of them, through their professionalism, intellect and skill, has left an indelible imprint not only on the organization, but have been able influence policy by creating space for dialogue and mutual learning.

Coming to the third one, and this is the one that I personally align with most, that is, setting up the

There are so many aspects of CPD’s contribution that one can admire. The Task force Report of 1991, setting up of the *Nagorik Committee* in 2006 which culminated in the Bangladesh Vision 2021, holding regular dialogues by bringing policymakers and concerned civil society individuals face to face to debate issues of national are only a few of those.

Citizen Platform for the SDGs. The objective behind this initiative was to ensure citizens' participation in the implementation and achievement of the SDG Goals and Targets. It was the brainchild of Distinguish Fellow Debapriya and received solid support from CPD as its Secretariat. Debapriya, is the mind, energy and soul behind this initiative and as the Convener of the platform has given it the leadership that has catapulted the platform to a formidable position of becoming the premier platform where the most marginalized people are able to voice their concerns safely and confidently with the hope that they will be listened to. Today the platform boasts of 200 plus partners all over the country and is guided by a core team of which I am honored to be one of the members. The beauty of the platform is in the voluntarism of the activities undertaken. Each one of the core group members and partner organizations, including senior members of CPD staff, have given time and effort unhesitatingly towards the success of the platform. The platform has held innumerable consultations all over the country, bringing together diverse people, specially marginalized groups to discuss, debate, give feedback and suggestions on the kind of society they want, pushing forward the "Leave No One behind" agenda of the SDGs. National level conferences have been held where senior policymakers were invited to listen to the voices of left behind groups. High quality reports have always followed the consultations with recommendations for policymakers to consider. I am always left in awe at the record time these reports are produced, demonstrating the prolific and productive ability of the team responsible.

CPD, in the last 30 years, has continued to be a dynamic and learning organization which has evolved, and reinvented itself as per the need and demand of society. I wish it every success in the coming years and am honored to be associated with it. To the leadership and every staff of CPD my heartiest congratulations, "You have truly earned the prestige and accolades through dint of your dedication and hard work and have done us all proud!"

Reflecting on 30 Years of CPD

A Journey from Inception to Influence and the Road Ahead

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) is observing its 30 years of existence this year. Heartiest congratulations to all those who have made this a reality. I had been one of those who have witnessed its birth from close and also been involved when it just began to crawl and finally walk. And many would say that it has begun to run now. That I will discuss later.

Professor Rehman Sobhan who had been my teacher at the University of Dhaka and later my employer as the Director of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) was the magnet around whom the CPD coalesced into a vibrant organization. During my own professional career as an economist/social scientist as well as others whom I observed immersed in analytical studies, we have made policy recommendations of various elaboration. These used to be often also presented to the stakeholders including those at the policymaker level. Often it so happened that these policymakers wanted a much more elaborate discussion of such policy recommendations, even to the point of one of them once demanding exact quantified level of action that would be desirable, a suggestion to which a person no other than Professor Nurul Islam who happened to be present at the event, guffawed. But the fact remained that there was under the surface a not so hidden demand for elaborate discussion of policies in general as well as policy recommendations based



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on studies. *Professor Rehman Sobhan* understood this well and when he left BIDS as its Director, he decided to set up CPD.

In the beginning CPD and BIDS had been almost synonymous as to the work force the former drew upon on the latter. The main vehicle for raising policy issues at the first few years had been the annual publication of the 'Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD)' series which drew heavily upon academics from BIDS including myself. I still remember the meetings that we had in the first office of CPD somewhere near Eskaton Ladies Club and also the signature snacks that *Professor Rehman Sobhan* always offered. Before going to discuss other issues, let me point out that CPD and BIDS always maintain a professional link in various ways. On many occasions BIDS personnel had been in CPD events and so were CPD personnel present in BIDS events. Indeed, even today, of the three main persons running the various events on a day-to-day basis at CPD, two are alumni of BIDS.

One particular aspect of our policies is that those in power who make the policies are always for it while those not in power think that these are all 'rubbish' to borrow the word of one of our former finance ministers, now deceased. The truth always lies somewhere in between. And indeed, it is hardly ever the case that policies formulated by one government are wholesale changed by the following political party in office. *Professor Sobhan* understood that they must exchange views not simply on their 'politics', but also more importantly on socio-economic policies for economic and social development of the country. He therefore began the practice of inviting persons from various political spectrum to debate the policies in force in the country as well as policy recommendations based on reviews and analyses of these policies to see if there could be some common understanding by them as well as finding common grounds of agreement. Even now one finds such people who are almost not on talking terms debating policy issues in the platform provided by CPD. And that I think it is one of the yeoman services provided by CPD. Of course, as it happens, straightforward talking may not always be liked by all and particularly at politically contentious times, CPD sometime had been charged with 'gross misrepresentation of facts' almost always by the party in power.

CPD over time has built up a dedicated force of people who attend to policy reviews in various fields of long-term importance as well some time issues of immediate urgency. One topic falling in the latter group is the budget analysis which I am sure many people do follow and is avidly reported by journalists. Indeed, this attention to media, or shall I say, media savviness, is one area in which CPD has excelled over most other such professional bodies which has brought it into contact with a large group of followers. But of course, this also has its seamier side. One may be tempted to play to the gallery and that of course goes against the basic founding principle of CPD.

Over time, CPD has worked in many areas of socio-economic relevance and importance to the country. One area which has remained important although had been external trade and economic relations with other countries. WTO negotiations had been avidly followed and analysed for policy action at home although how much of these had actually been properly understood and acted upon by those at the helm of affairs remains in doubt. One area which is much to my liking is the one on 'Leave No One Behind', through an efficient and balanced implementation of SDGs in all its fields. And the third extremely important area of current activity, much to my liking, constitutes analysis of existential parameters related to environment, climate change and associated issues.

Even now, one finds such people who are almost at no talking terms debating policy issues in the platform provided by CPD. And that I think it is one of the yeoman services provided by CPD.

So which way forward for CPD now? CPD may have already thought about these or I hope is being internally debated among the staffers. One must understand that most policies or at least their implementation are interconnected and sometime the implementation of one is the sin qua non for that of another. CPD staffers, therefore, should apply their minds to see if this is happening in the country. My hypothesis is that in most

cases this is not. Second, there are several fields, such as agriculture (broadly speaking), health and nutrition, manufacturing industries and some others like service sector, which have received limited attention and need to be emphasized for the future. And third, just policy discussion is not enough. One needs solid technical analysis behind policies. A beginning may be made by analysing policy implementation and barriers to them. It may be that CPD alone may not do all of it but may enter into partnership with other organisations for fuller understanding of the problems.

সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগ (সিপিডি)

সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগ (সিপিডি) ১৯৯৩ সালে বাংলাদেশের প্রখ্যাত সমাজ সচেতন মানবিক অর্থনীতিবিদ ড. রেহমান সোবহানের নেতৃত্বে প্রতিষ্ঠিত হয়। গবেষণাধর্মী এই প্রতিষ্ঠানটি গঠিত হয় মূলত সমাজের সুবিধাবঞ্চিত মানুষের ন্যায়বিচার প্রাপ্তি, সমাজে সুশাসন এবং ন্যায্যতা প্রতিষ্ঠার জন্য। সিপিডি গণতান্ত্রিক প্রক্রিয়াকে শক্তিশালীকরণ, বৈষম্য ও দারিদ্র দূরীকরণের লক্ষ্যে একটি আর্থিক নীতিমালা ও কর্মসূচি ও জাতীয় বাজেট প্রণয়ন, ও সমাজের পিছিয়ে পড়া জনগোষ্ঠীকে নিয়ে একটি অন্তর্ভুক্তিমূলক সমাজ উন্নয়নের লক্ষ্যে বহুমুখি কর্মতৎপরতা চালিয়ে যাচ্ছে। অভিষ্ঠ লক্ষ্যে পৌছাতে বিভিন্ন উল্লেখযোগ্য গবেষণা কার্যক্রম, নীতিনির্ধারণী পর্যায়ে এ্যাডভোকেসি, জনপ্রতিনিধি, নীতিনির্ধারণক, উচ্চ পর্যায়ের সরকারি কর্মকর্তা, উন্নয়ন সহযোগী সংস্থাসহ সমাজে সকল অংশের প্রতিনিধি, নারী ও তরণদের অংশগ্রহনে ধারাবাহিকভাবে বিভিন্ন ইস্যুতে সংলাপের আয়োজন করে থাকে। এই সমস্ত সংলাপ এবং সংলাপ থেকে প্রাপ্ত সুপারিশের মাধ্যমে একদিকে যেমন বিভিন্ন অংশের মধ্যে অভিজ্ঞতা বিনিময়ের সুযোগ সৃষ্টি অপর দিকে রাষ্ট্রীয় নীতি নির্ধারণেও বিশেষ ভূমিকা রেখে চলেছে।

আমরা জানি একটি অসাম্প্রদায়িক, গণতান্ত্রিক, নারী-পুরুষের সমতাভিত্তিক মানবিক মূল্যবোধ সম্পন্ন দেশ ও সমাজ গঠনের লক্ষ্যে মুক্তিযুদ্ধ সংগঠিত হয়েছিল। এই লক্ষ্য বাস্তবায়নের জন্য প্রণীত হয়েছিল '৭২ এর সংবিধান। আজ স্বাধীনতার অর্ধশত বছর পেরিয়ে গেলেও আমরা দেখছি সমাজের সুবিধাবঞ্চিত সহ সকল মানুষের জন্য ন্যায়বিচার ও সুশাসন প্রতিষ্ঠিত হয়নি। বিগত কয়েক বছরে বাংলাদেশে অবকাঠামোগত উন্নয়ন চোখে পড়ার মতো হলেও এই উন্নয়নের ধারাবাহিকতাকে টিকিয়ে রাখার জন্য প্রয়োজন মানবিক



ডা. মালেকা বানু
সাধারণ সম্পাদক
বাংলাদেশ মহিলা পরিষদ

উন্নয়ন, মানব সম্পদের উন্নয়ন ও সুশাসন প্রতিষ্ঠা, দারিদ্র ও বৈষম্য দূরীকরণ। যাতে করে উন্নয়নের সুফল দেশের নারী-পুরুষ, প্রান্তিক জনগণ সহ সকল মানুষ ভোগ করতে পারে। সিপিডি গঠনমূলক বিশ্লেষণ ও সমালোচনার মাধ্যমে এক্ষেত্রে সরকার এবং নাগরিক সমাজের দায়িত্বকে দেশবাসীর সামনে তুলে ধরে।

সিপিডি'র একটি উল্লেখযোগ্য কার্যক্রম প্রতিবছর জাতীয় বাজেট ঘোষণাকে কেন্দ্র করে নাগরিক সংলাপ এবং আর্থিক পর্যালোচনা ও সুপারিশ। এবং পরবর্তীতে জাতীয় বাজেট ঘোষণার পরে তাৎক্ষণিক এবং বিস্তারিত পর্যবেক্ষণ। সিপিডির মতো একটি বেসরকারি অরাজনৈতিক বহুলপরিচিত সংগঠনের এই বিশ্লেষণ নাগরিক সমাজের কাছে একটি আগ্রহের জায়গা তৈরি করেছে। একইসঙ্গে নীতি-নির্ধারকদের কাছেও গুরুত্ব বহন করে।

সিপিডি'র আর একটি বড় শক্তি হলো নাগরিক সমাজের বিভিন্ন প্রতিষ্ঠানগুলোর মধ্যে ফলপ্রসূ নেটওয়ার্ক স্থাপন করে কাজ করা। এজন্য সিপিডি নাগরিক সমাজের বিভিন্ন শ্রেণী পেশার মানুষের সাথে সংলাপ, গবেষণা, প্রকাশনা ও প্রচারের কাজ করে থাকে। তারমধ্যে উল্লেখযোগ্য ২০১৫ সালে জাতিসংঘ ঘোষিত টেকসই উন্নয়ন লক্ষ্যমাত্রা অর্জনে নাগরিক প্ল্যাটফর্ম নামে গঠিত একটি প্ল্যাটফর্ম, যার সেক্রেটারিয়েট হিসেবে সিপিডি কাজ করে যাচ্ছে। এই প্ল্যাটফর্মে যুক্ত আছে সমাজের বিভিন্ন অংশের অধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠায় আন্দোলনরত শতাধিত সংগঠন। এই প্ল্যাটফর্মের মূল লক্ষ্য হলো এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নের মধ্য দিয়ে দেশে সুশাসন, মানবাধিকার ও আইনের শাসন ও সমতা প্রতিষ্ঠা করতে সরকারকে নানাভাবে সহায়তা করা এসডিজির সুফল যাতে প্রান্তিক জনগোষ্ঠীর কাছে পৌঁছে সে ব্যাপারেও এই নাগরিক প্ল্যাটফর্মটি সক্রিয়। মুক্তিযুদ্ধের স্বপ্নের বাংলাদেশ গড়ার প্রত্যয় নিয়ে সহযোগী সংগঠনগুলোকে নিয়ে সিপিডি আন্তরিকভাবে কাজ করে যাচ্ছে। এছাড়াও এই প্ল্যাটফর্মটি এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নে অগ্রগতি এবং মাত্রা নির্ধারণ করে থাকে। এ ব্যাপারে বৈশ্বিক অঙ্গনেও সিপিডি দৃশ্যমান ভূমিকা রেখে চলেছে।

সিপিডি বর্তমান জনমিতির উল্লেখযোগ্য অংশ দেশের তরুণ ও যুবসমাজকে সংগঠিত করে তাদের মনন-মেধা ও অন্তর্নিহিত

প্ল্যাটফর্মের মূল লক্ষ্য হলো এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নের মধ্য দিয়ে দেশে সুশাসন, মানবাধিকার ও আইনের শাসন ও সমতা প্রতিষ্ঠা করতে সরকারকে নানাভাবে সহায়তা করা। এসডিজির সুফল যাতে প্রান্তিক জনগোষ্ঠীর কাছে পৌঁছে সে ব্যাপারেও এই নাগরিক প্ল্যাটফর্মটি সক্রিয়।

সক্ষমতাকে কাজে লাগিয়ে দেশের উন্নয়নে সম্পৃক্ত করার ক্ষেত্রে সচেতন উদ্যোগী প্রয়াস চালিয়ে যাচ্ছে। যা ভবিষ্যত বাংলাদেশ গড়ার ক্ষেত্রে উল্লেখযোগ্য ভূমিকা রাখবে বলে আশা করা যায়। সিপিডি তার নিজস্ব কার্যক্রমেও নবীন অর্থনীতিবিদদের সম্পৃক্ত করে তাদের মানস গঠনে এবং দক্ষতা অর্জনেও বিশেষ ভূমিকা রেখে চলেছে।

সিপিডির গবেষণা ও প্রকাশনা সমূহ এদেশের সকল মানুষের অধিকার আদায়ের লড়াইয়ে বিশেষ ভূমিকা রাখছে এবং ভবিষ্যত প্রজন্মের জন্য তথ্যভান্ডার হিসাবে থাকবে।

বাংলাদেশের থিংক ট্যাংক সিপিডি ওয়ার্ল্ড ইকোনোমিক ফোরামের একটি অংশীদার প্রতিষ্ঠান। শুধু বাংলাদেশ নয় দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার দেশগুলির থিংক-ট্যাংক গুলোর মধ্যেও অন্যতম স্বনামধন্য প্রতিষ্ঠান।

বাংলাদেশ মহিলা পরিষদ সিপিডি'র ৩০ বছর পূর্তিতে আন্তরিক অভিনন্দন জানাই। সিপিডি বাংলাদেশের নারী আন্দোলন, বৈষম্য দূরীকরণ এবং সমতা প্রতিষ্ঠার সংগ্রাম একসাথে অগ্রসর করে নিয়ে যাবে।

Cherishing Cooperation for Regional Peace, Progress and Prosperity *Vibrant Institutional Partnership of CPD and RIS*

Given the historical context of colonial rule and specific sectional priorities in South Asia, regional integration has been both a major challenge and an opportunity at the same time. There has been no dearth of contestations and conflicts. However, there have also been scores of efforts launched for peace, prosperity and progress. Think tanks, research institutions and academics have played an important role in promoting the idea of a closely linked South Asian region, eventually developing as an economic force in the global economy for articulating concerns of the developing or lead developed world and at the same time also emerging as a source of welfare of the masses at the regional and national levels.

It is in this context, the year of 2024 is of great significance. The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) is celebrating its 30th Anniversary and the RIS is celebrating 40th Anniversary. It is of great importance not only for the South Asia, but also for the larger world of Southern economies that they played an important role in evolution of the idea of Global South. RIS was an outcome of collective commitment of the Non-Aligned Movement at its Summit in New Delhi in 1983. While RIS got the opportunity of working closely in the evolution of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in 1985, CPD and RIS both played significant roles, in respective settings in the



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Director General, Research and Information System for
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evolution of BIMSTEC, IORA and India-Bangladesh bilateral cooperation. Research papers, conferences and collective endeavors from both the institutions have contributed to these regional academic strengths. Since CPD is deeply engaged in fostering regional cooperation in the vital areas such as trade, investment, development cooperation and related themes, it could provide leadership in inculcating institutional bonding across the region.

Individual personalities have also played an important role in getting space created for partnerships across research institutions. Professor V.R. Panchamukhi at RIS and *Professor Rehman Sobhan* from CPD could effectively partner and bring forward the best in the region. The efforts were duly supplemented by stalwarts like Lal Jayawardena, Gamani Correa and later by Saman Kelegama from Sri Lanka. My own predecessors at RIS, *Dr Nagesh Kumar* and *Dr Biswajit Dhar*, continued the work on regional integration. *Dr Nagesh* could also reinforce it from his positions at the UN. The legacy is further being enriched in the region by *Dr Dushni Weerakoon*, *Dr Poshraj Pandey*, *Dr Abid Suleri* and *Dr Chewang Rinzin*.

Commitment for Regional Cooperation

Since CPD is deeply engaged in fostering regional cooperation in the vital areas such as trade, investment, development cooperation and related themes, it could provide leadership in inculcating institutional bonding across the region.

With increasing awareness that a coordinated strategy of development would facilitate the task of fully exploiting the potential of complementarities in the region to mutual advantage, SAARC embarked on the path of extending the scope of cooperation in the economic fields. While RIS was tasked in the 1990s to examine the potential of extending mutually beneficial economic links among the SAARC nations in trade, investment, technology, the scope expanded further with coming up of major think tanks in other SAARC member

countries, like the Centre for Policy Dialogue in Bangladesh, Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) in Sri Lanka among others. This gave the necessary impetus to the collective efforts for moving together for realizing the aim of deepening and strengthening the economic integration in the SAARC region. In this regard, it needs to be underlined that eminent economist *Professor Rehman Sobhan* from Bangladesh had played the vital role in ensuring greater coordination with his colleagues in the SAARC region, for taking forward the idea of establishing a vibrant Asian Economic Community.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) was established in 1993, exactly after 10 years of establishment of RIS. The founder of CPD, *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, has been closely associated with the work programme of RIS since its inception. He and all the subsequent heads of CPD, *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya*, *Professor Mustafizur Rahman* and *Dr Fahmida Khatun*, have always been kind enough to join us for interactions on issues of common interest for promoting economic integration in the South Asian region. With *Southern Voice* Debu Da opened new vistas for CPD with Global South. Dr Mustafizur provided leadership on trade and tariff while *Dr Fahmida* provided impressive leadership on SDGs and connect with wider public participation with CPD.

Professor Panchamukhi and *Professor Sobhan* co-edited the prestigious volume '*Towards an Asian Economic Area*', published in 1993, that highlighted the development challenges faced by the countries in the Asian region. These include the problem of choosing the development paradigm and strategy, critical issues of the development process, evolving an agenda for the South, and searching for a framework for effective economic cooperation in the Asian region. The volume emphasized on regional cooperation that provides a strong rationale for the formation of an Asian Economic Area, for fostering closer economic integration among Asian countries for their mutual benefit. This volume was a follow up on an international conference on 'Challenges to the South in the Nineties with Special Reference to the Asian Region' organized by RIS in March 1993, as part of an initiative taken by the South Centre, Geneva.

As mentioned, RIS and CPD have also collaborated in contributing to the work programme of BIMSTEC. In fact, CPD was a participatory institution when RIS was entrusted with the mandate for preparation of a paper on *Future Directions of BIMSTEC*. The focus emerged on connectivity plans and cross-border trade.

This relationship has been reinforced further by the South Asian Centre for Policy Studies which was co-founded by CPD; Centre for Policy Research, India; and other eminent institutions from the region. SACEPS brought together scholars and institutions for conducting collaborative research with close interactions with policymakers, intellectuals and civil society organizations. Through a network, built over the years, it has tried to contribute policy research inputs at different forums for promoting socio-economic cooperation in the region. Professor Arjun Sengupta and Professor Muchkund Dubey facilitated these linkages as did the support from Professor Deepak Nayyar, Professor Akmal Hussain in recent times.

Presently, SACEPS is hosted at RIS. A volume '*Manufacturing and Jobs in South Asia: Strategy for Sustainable Economic Growth*' under the auspicious of SACEPS was also brought out. It has also been enriched by a valuable contribution from the colleagues from CPD on 'Job Creation in the Manufacturing Sector as a Strategy for Sustainable Economic Growth in Bangladesh'.

The South Asia Economic Summit Process is also an important initiative, launched by SACEPS with partner institutions. The SAES is an important policy forum for academics, policymakers, diplomats and other experts from the region. South Asian nations, namely Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have hosted this conclave in rotation. Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives have also been part of the process. This SAES Forum deliberates on key issues of regional economic cooperation, sustainable development and people-to-people linkages. Launched in 2008, it has been hosted by premier think-tanks in the region including Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh. The 13th South Asia Economic Summit took place in New Delhi on 19-20 April 2022 after a gap of two year. The Meeting could not be convened in 2020 owing to outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic

and multiple challenges thrown up by it. CPD hosted the 14th SAES in Dhaka at the end of 2023 as part of its program and commemorated 30 years of its journey. RIS, in turn, hosted a special conference on December 2023 dedicated to the issue of South Asian cooperation as part of celebrations for its 40th anniversary.

Economic issues remain the foundation of the academic exchange between our two institutions. In past, both our institutions had been part of the SAARC Group of Eminent Persons that produced the SAARC Vision Beyond the Year 2000 report. We were led in this effort by Professor Muchkund Dubey and *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, respectively from RIS and CPD. Continuing the endeavor, we have been evolving the content of academic partnership with continued challenges of unequal recovery from the pandemic, fiscal stress, grossly inadequate development and issues related to climate finance and their impact on development outcomes. We have focused our energies in framing strategies and generating evidence towards regional public goods and leveraging digital systems for trade facilitation, payment systems and their unique applications in other fields. It is also important to mention that Bangladesh has been inducted as the newest member of the New Development Bank. It was invited by India as a Guest Country for the G20 Summit. As the world goes through geopolitical churn, Bangladesh is going to be an important partner in the Indo-Pacific. India and Bangladesh are also working closely on the blue economy.

In fact, both RIS and CPD have immensely contributed to policy narratives in their countries and have also been working for strengthening bilateral relations and working towards a prosperous South Asia. The journey of CPD marks an important era of economic transformation in the region as the world embraced globalization more holistically and created participatory

The journey of CPD marks an important era of economic transformation in the region as the world embraced globalization more holistically and created participatory institutions like WTO. The natural bonding between RIS and CPD is rooted in the fact that both our institutions contribute more robustly towards economic policymaking and global governance narratives in the areas of trade, investment, finance, technology and social sector development.

institutions like WTO. The natural bonding between RIS and CPD is rooted in the fact that both our institutions contribute more robustly towards economic policymaking and global governance narratives in the areas of trade, investment, finance, technology and social sector development. On development models, both countries need to learn from each other, as we share common geography and culture. CPD and RIS have recently collaborated on issues of SDGs, regional connectivity, agriculture value chains, manufacturing and jobs, science, technology and innovation, renewable energy transition as well as climate change and Blue Economy related issues.

As CPD celebrates its 30th year milestone, I firmly believe that RIS and CPD have a long way to go for working together for achieving the goal of ensuring inclusive and sustainable growth in the South Asian region. Establishing a strong Asian Economic Community is also the much desired objective of this vibrant institutional relationship. Our all the best wishes to colleagues at CPD for their grand success in achieving the objectives that CPD has set forth for serving the national, regional and international research community and contributing to deliverable policymaking process for ensuring inclusive sustainable development.

A Message *Celebrating Thirty Years of CPD's Journey*

I was born on May 28 in 1945 at Shillong, the capital of Assam. After the partition in 1947, my father moved to Dhaka.

After completing my graduation and post-graduation from the University of Dhaka in Political Science in 1967, I joined a private company for a short time. Later, appearing in the CSS exam, I joined the audit and accounts cadre. And gradually after serving different ministries, I retired as the Commerce Secretary in 2004.

Since then, for the 18 to 20 years, I am not connected with the government. However, I am connected with the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), as the organisation invites me when there are any seminars or events over trade and commerce issues.

To be frank, CPD is a dynamic organization and I feel interested in attending the CPD events as the top-brasses of the organization are hard-working individuals. CPD activities are fruitful and engaging.

CPD is far more serious in their activities and is seriously working for the overall economic upliftment of the country, which is beneficial for both the country and the government.



Suhel Ahmed Choudhury
Former Commerce Secretary and
Former Chairman, Janata Bank

Typically, a government operates with government officials. But not all of them are serious. On the contrary, a research institute works more seriously. If they are not serious, they will not survive. So, I think in the economy, or when the budget is analysed, the finance ministry takes note of the analysis, and communicates with the organizations. Ultimately, it makes the government beneficial.

The CPD sends agreed points from different analysis or seminars to the government, to finance ministry or to the commerce ministry. And it benefits both parties.

So, to me, the lovely ties between both the parties work like supplement to each other, it is healthy for the nation and the country, as well.

However, if there is any research, analysis or any opinion, surely, they communicate with the government.

CPD is a dynamic organization and I feel interested in attending the CPD events as the top-brasses of the organization are hard-working individuals. CPD activities are fruitful and engaging.

The way the CPD has marched ahead in the past days, it is important to remain on track with the same activity flow.

The existing CPD leaders should train their subordinates perfectly, to have some capable and efficient successors once they retire.

Celebrating 30 Years of CPD's Establishment—A Write-up

CPD has been making significant contribution for the last thirty years as a pioneer think tank of Bangladesh in the socioeconomic development of the country. There is hardly any burning or emerging issue in the socioeconomic arena that has not received the benefit of CPD'S research, analysis and suggestions for improvement. CPD researches are done in a very highly professional manner with in depth analysis and maintaining political neutrality. Through arranging dialogues on many socio-economic issues, CPD provides an important platform for citizens of the country and stakeholders to reflect their thoughts on those issues and voice their expectations and suggestions.

CPD makes a huge contribution during the formulation process of the annual budget of the country by providing to all stakeholders a critical view of the prevailing economy, its challenges, priorities and way forward to address those challenges. CPD's in-depth analysis helps the stakeholders such as policymakers, government officials, industry, business community, civil society organizations, labor rights organizations and researchers to provide informed opinion on the budget proposals. After the announcement of the budget, CPD also arranges a dialogue for all stakeholders to reflect their opinion on their expectations and shortcomings of the budget. In this process, they make



Siddiqur Rahman Choudhury
Former Secretary, Finance Division
Former Chairman, Agrani Bank

invaluable contribution in developing ownership of the citizens in the budget process of the country.

For more than two decades, I have been associated with CPD through participation in their various dialogues, seminars and workshops. I have extensively used the findings of CPD's research and analysis when I was working in the Ministry of Finance. Those were very helpful in formulating policies and making informed decision.

CPD has done a great job through their research and arranging dialogues on almost all the important issues of Bangladesh Economy. I think Bangladesh would have been greatly benefitted if CPD conducted more research on the success stories of Bangladesh, to find out that despite the many failed projects, why a number of initiatives in primary health care, primary and mass education, women empowerment, microcredit, mobile financial services etc. have been so successful. What are the lessons learnt from those initiatives?

For more than two decades, I have been associated with CPD through participation in their various dialogues, seminars and workshops. I have extensively used the findings of CPD's research and analysis when I was working in the Ministry of Finance. Those were very helpful in formulating policies and making informed decision.

In Bangladesh, many good ideas do not produce the anticipated results because of the poor implementation. As we all know, Bangladesh has serious implementation problems. In this context, I would suggest that CPD should include in their research list, problems of implementation and suggest remedial measures.

Congratulations to CPD on its 30 years of establishment. My best wishes for a continued success of CPD.

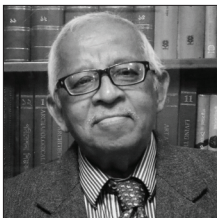
A Message *Celebrating Thirty Years of CPD's Journey*

When *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, my dear teacher from the University of Dhaka, established CPD, like others, I felt a breath of fresh air. The 1990s was a seminal decade for Bangladesh. Bangladesh had started a new journey with democracy. The nation was badly in need of a rudder that would be unbiased and neutral, and yet give a direction to the nation from an academic and policy point of view. Who else better could have done so than *Rehman Sobhan Sir*?

Thirty years later, Bangladesh has moved on from step to step. With Bangladesh, CPD has also moved on, but kept true to its initial sprit—to act as an impartial spokesman for the civil society.

It is a pleasure to be able to write on the thirtieth anniversary of CPD. The spirit that was founded by my Teacher, *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, has been upheld over the years. My prayers that this spirit carries on.

The 1990s was a seminal decade for Bangladesh. Bangladesh had started a new journey with democracy. The nation was badly in need of a rudder that would be unbiased and neutral, and yet give a direction to the nation from an academic and policy point of view. Who else better could have done so than *Rehman Sobhan Sir*?



Professor Amirul Islam Chowdhury
Former Professor and Vice-Chancellor
Jahangirnagar University

A Message

Celebrating Thirty Years of CPD's Journey

Since its inception in 1993, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has established an exceptionally high benchmark as a national think tank and has had profound impact on national policymaking. Over the last thirty years, CPD has resolutely promoted the vision of an inclusive Bangladesh based on equity, justice, fairness and good governance by bringing together research and advocacy in the public domain.

CPD has established itself as the leading think tank in Bangladesh by consistently drawing attention of the policymakers to a plethora of contemporary issues that needed urgent resolution. Let me highlight CPD's promotion of good governance in Bangladesh as this subject has been close to my heart. CPD has undertaken in-depth assessment and analysis of state actors and institutional processes over a period of time. Based on such diagnostic studies, CPD has been putting forward comprehensive sets of recommendations for the policymakers and public, which have generated healthy debate and discussion—a key objective of any think tank.

CPD, given its remarkable convening capacity, consistently brought together esteemed representatives from various state and nonstate actors and engaged them in meaningful discussions on good governance. For instance, in 2000, CPD organized a dialogue on the 'State of



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Executive Director
Centre for Peace and Justice, BRAC University

Governance and Budget Response 2000’, which was attended by politicians and academics. Among other things, the discussion covered a range of factors that hindered effective governance in Bangladesh, and also explored potential strategies for the promotion of good governance. In the same year, CPD organized another dialogue on ‘Strengthening Local Government: Recent Experience and Future Agenda’, which brought together politicians, bureaucrats, professionals, representatives of various local government bodies, academics, NGO activists, and representatives from international development partners and civil society members. It highlighted the major problems faced by the local government bodies and aimed to help policymakers to design effective policies for local government reform.

In 2011, I was invited to an in-house workshop organized by CPD on the ‘Parliament of Bangladesh: Preliminary Findings’. Participants were invited to share innovative suggestions to improve the functioning of the Jatiyo Sangsad. Over the years, CPD has continued to make significant contributions to the good governance discourse by organizing numerous dialogues and publishing reports and op-eds on the issue. Needless to say, through its work, CPD has inspired many NGOs to undertake research on governance, which contributed to the raising of mass awareness on some of the most pressing issues confronting Bangladesh.

It’s equally impressive to note how CPD has fostered new leadership within its own organizational structure over the years while also offering employment opportunities to many young researchers. I have been greatly impressed by CPD’s Young Scholar Seminar Series (YSSS) sessions, which provided a platform for young researchers to present their research findings to relevant stakeholders.

Through its work, CPD has inspired many NGOs to undertake research on governance, which contributed to the raising of mass awareness on some of the most pressing issues confronting Bangladesh.

Thirty Years of CPD

I convey my warmest regards and heartiest congratulations to CPD as it celebrates its remarkable 30-year journey. As we set our sights on a much brighter future for our nation, I do hope that CPD will continue to soar to greater heights of success and enrich us with their groundbreaking and courageous activities.

A Message *Celebrating Thirty Years of CPD's Journey*

So far, I can remember it was way back in 2004 when first I got invitation from Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) to take part in their event. Honestly speaking I was feeling honored with a little surprise. In fact, I became President of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BKMEA) only a few months back and until then BKMEA was not that much familiar to think tanks, media and policymakers & my connections were even much poorer. So, at that stage, receiving an invitation from a leading think tank organization like CPD, was a positive surprise to me. Can't remember the exact date but the venue of that event was CIRDAP auditorium near National Press Club and topic was Compliance issues in garments sector.

It was indeed a great opportunity for me to introduce myself with leading think tanks, economists, policymakers, journalists, labor leaders in one event. I was delighted to be introduced to *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya* and *Professor Mustafizur Rahman* among many others in that event. It was just the beginning of never-ending journey/relationship with CPD and its key personalities.

I don't think that I have the capabilities to evaluate the roles CPD played over the last 3 decades in our socio-economic development but as a layman, what I observed, CPD was always very vocal with their findings



Md. Fazlul Hoque

Former President, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BKMEA)

& analysis on every important socio-economic issue and sometimes they touched on political issues in similar fashion. It might be true that concerned authorities are not always happy with CPD's remarks/observations, but I believe all of them give proper importance to CPD's observations despite in various occasions they showed serious reactions publicly. It is excellent to see that CPD never compromised with their position against such serious reactions from influential groups including policymakers and that is why CPD is highly popular among the conscious citizens of the country.

The apparel sector is one of the most (maybe the most) important pillar of our economy and there is no surprise that CPD has been very much vocal on different issues in this sector. CPD has been working relentlessly to uphold the safety, security, workers' wages and rights issues of apparel sector through organizing round table, seminars etc. on regular basis. They have conducted a good number of surveys & research on this sector.

In fact, we, the apparel sector's members/leaders, did not always feel comfortable with their criticism, opinion & remarks but it is also true that those efforts from CPD made us much more careful & responsible to enhance the image and acceptability of the sector. I think observations from CPD was one of the crucial guidance followed by the apparel sector in last couple of decades and this practice might continue in years to come.

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In this connection, I have one specific expectation from CPD. Till now they have organized so many programs on apparel owners' responsibility where leaders of this sector always took part spontaneously and made sure their accountability in this respect. But there is no such event that has been organized by CPD where responsibility of the buyers' group was the topic which would make sure of their accountability publicly. In

recent years, this sector spent hundreds of millions dollars for workplace safety and thus this sector became one of the safest among the major apparel exporting countries. Besides, more than two hundreds of Green factory certified by USGBC joined in this sector during last few years. So, this sector well deserved better pay from its buyers' group. I hope soon CPD will organize such an event which might be the beginning of many such programs in coming days.

If I analyze CPD's role on my personal development, I must say that it was a great opportunity for me to be associated with different programs, surveys and research studies conducted by them on various occasions. Not only the program was organized in connection with apparel sector, I got invitation to take part in the events organized on other socio-economic issues where I could deliver my thoughts on the issues and more importantly learned a lot from the experts' valuable deliberations who took part in those events. Sharing my ideas/views with leading experts of the country (sometime from abroad as well) on various issues was always a remarkable experience for me.

Apart from CPD as an organization, the think tanks like *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya*, *Professor Mustafizur Rahman*, *Dr Fahmida Khatun*, *Khondaker Golam Moazzem* and others also had a great impact on me. I got the opportunity to interact with them very closely and regularly. Those interactions obviously enriched my knowledge, experience and confidence.

Finally, it is truly a fantastic milestone, achieved by CPD, of continuing their high standard activities for long 30 years. No doubt it is a comprehensive team performance with top level of professionalism. Hats off to the CPD and its team members. Wishing them greater success in their journey for next decades.

A Message

Celebrating Thirty Years of CPD's Journey

From the very beginning, I have been a strong advocate for *Professor Rehman Sobhan* to establish the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). The idea was to establish an open platform where people could interact with the policymakers directly. I always believed that policy formulation should prioritize consultation with interested parties, ensuring that their perspectives are thoroughly considered. I am glad that I made this suggestion because CPD has consistently shown its effectiveness in engaging people and genuinely considering their opinions.

I believe that policy formation should be a participatory process, involving those interested in sharing and exchanging their views. Through such exchanges, policies can be crafted that reflect the diverse perspectives of the people. CPD has excelled in establishing a framework for discussion and consultation among various stakeholders in policy formulation. Its role in involving people, considering their views, and communicating them to policymakers has been commendable.

Policy dialogue is an ongoing, long-term endeavor, not a one-time event. CPD should persist in involving people in policy discussions at all levels. Looking ahead, I envision CPD enhancing its institutional capacity over the next 30 years, ensuring that people's voices are not only heard but also valued in shaping policies. I hope to see CPD actively



Dr Kamal Hossain

Former Minister for Law and Foreign Affairs

encouraging youth groups to participate in policy discussions, fostering an environment where diverse perspectives are welcomed and considered. It is crucial that CPD continues to prioritize the expression of views from all segments of society, ensuring inclusivity and effectiveness in policymaking processes.

I am optimistic that CPD will persist in its efforts to engage people, incorporate their perspectives, and ensure that policies are shaped with the input of the community before being finalized.

Looking ahead, I envision CPD enhancing its institutional capacity over the next 30 years, ensuring that people's voices are not only heard but also valued in shaping policies. I hope to see CPD actively encouraging youth groups to participate in policy discussions, fostering an environment where diverse perspectives are welcomed and considered.

A Few Words of Appreciation for CPD

Centre for Policy Dialogue has emerged as the prime private-sector think tank of Bangladesh in the thirty years of its establishment under the extraordinary leadership of its founder *Professor Rehman Sobhan* and his able successors *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya*, *Professor Mustafizur Rahman* and *Dr Fahmida Khatun*. The Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), the internationally reputed research organization of the country, has its limitations as a government organization. It cannot always speak out the stark truths about the economy and political economy of the country because of some hidden barriers, though most of the researchers of BIDS are very talented and capable researchers and analyzers. Especially, during the days of undemocratic and autocratic regimes of the country, BIDS faced quite a few obstacles in going into proper depths of analysis on various sensitive issues of political reality of the country.

I express my gratitude to *Professor Rehman Sobhan* for opening up an independent and outspoken outlet for exposing the bitter truths about the political economy of the country without fear of any quarters and favor to anyone for any purpose. I have been a great fan of CPD throughout its thirty-year existence for its fearless stands on many economic and political issues of the nation. As a participant in CPD dialogues, I had the privilege to speak out my mind on many such issues



Dr Muinul Islam

Retired Professor of Economics

University of Chittagong, Bangladesh

from the platform provided by CPD. In a few of such dialogues, CPD authorities might have felt apprehensive about reactions from the government quarters about my outspoken views, but they quite often appreciated my hardline approach on the issues. I call a spade a spade without fear or favor.

The governments of least developed countries like Bangladesh have an ingrained tendency to manipulate and doctor the vital statistics and sensitive information about the economy of the country. They try to inflate the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), per capita GNI, government's achievements in the field of economic development, life expectancy and literacy rate. They try to under-estimate and under-report population growth rate, total population, unemployment, birth and death rates, infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate, total fertility rate, population under the poverty line and extreme poverty line, extensive growth of corruption in the government agencies, etc. Therefore, the world bodies and the international organizations like the UN, World Bank, IMF and ADB and the prime research organizations of the world in general do not trust the official statistics of the Government of Bangladesh on most vital issues of the country.

They publish their own versions in most such issues, which differ significantly from government figures. This is a great shame that we could not achieve the respectability and credibility of the government-published statistical bodies like the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) after even 52 years of independence of the country. It is quite a frustrating experience for independent and conscientious researchers like us in the field of Economics.

CPD has emerged as a vocal forum for speaking out the truth in these fields, which has put CPD directly

I express my gratitude to *Professor Rahman Sobhan* for opening up an independent and outspoken outlet for exposing the bitter truths about the political economy of the country without fear of any quarters and favor to anyone for any purpose. I have been a great fan of CPD throughout its thirty-year existence for its fearless stands on many economic and political issues of the nation.

in confrontation-path with the government's positions. In the last 30 years, a number of such debates, feuds and quarrels have been observed between CPD researchers and the government functionaries and spokesmen. In a few cases, the prime minister of the country and the ministers were vehemently critical of CPD and its prime researchers on such differences of opinion. There were instances when the ruling party spokesmen directly threatened the researchers of dire consequences because of their supposedly adversary roles, and they often crossed the frontiers of decency and etiquette.

I am happy that the CPD researchers did not bow down to government pressures on such issues. Even *Professor Rehman Sobhan* had to face the ire of the prime minister in a number of issues of confrontation although everyone, who is aware of the independence movement and liberation war of Bangladesh, knows that he was one of the boldest stalwarts of the country and one of the most respected icons among our nation's founding fathers. I heartily congratulate CPD's researchers for their boldness and their unwavering commitments to remain truthful at all costs.

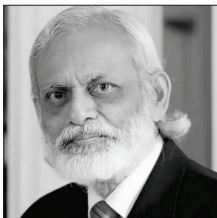
Now, coming to the issue of inviting participants in policy dialogues of CPD, I have to say that CPD has shown a tendency to invite experts residing in Dhaka rather than appropriate persons from other parts of the country. I also feel that controversial persons should be avoided as far as possible. I myself feel left out on many issues of dialogue, where my expertise is well-known and familiar throughout the country. Maybe, resource constraint is an issue in this case. But I strongly believe that CPD can overcome such limitations in the future. Proper depth of analysis cannot be reached if genuinely informed participants are left out of the crucial dialogues on various sensitive national issues. I also feel that the CPD Bulletins and other publications of CPD should be more rigorous and analytical in the future. A refereed journal of international repute should be published by CPD on bi-annual basis. I wish CPD a prosperous and pro-active future.

CPD at Thirty *Observations of a Companion*

First, my heartiest congratulations to the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) on its attaining thirty years of age. It is a great pleasure and satisfaction that I have been associated with it for much of its three decades long journey. And it is nice to see that during this journey, the organization has gone from strength to strength.

Although I was away from the country when CPD was set up by my respected teacher *Professor Sobhan*, I followed its work and developments with interest because of several reasons. First, it was one of the earliest such organizations outside the public sector; and I was naturally interested to see how it works. Second, I was also interested to see how an organization whose primary focus seemed to be on ‘dialogue’ would function and what would be the role of research—especially if dialogues were to be informed by solid evidence and analysis. A visionary personality *Professor Sobhan* is and the stature and reputation he already had in the society, I guess nobody had any doubt about its success. But how it would work had to be seen.

During the three decades of its existence, CPD has metamorphosed from a primarily dialogue-focused organization to a research-cum-dialogue entity—at least to an observer and companion like me. Also noteworthy is how it grew from a small private think-tank at the



Dr Rizwanul Islam

Economist, Former Special Adviser
International Labour Office, Geneva

national level to one with global level involvement and reputation. Today, CPD is a well-known brand name not only at the national level but also in the global scene on development discourse.

While *Professor Rehman Sobhan* was already established as a visionary leader, those who followed him also showed good leadership skills and ably steered the organization to strengthen it further. Several of CPD's work can be cited as the first of its kind in Bangladesh. Independent review of the economy, regular independent monitoring of the economic performance, the civil society's movement on selecting honest and qualified candidates for elections, and decentralization of policy dialogues can be cited as examples of such work.

While working on national and global level issues, CPD has not forgotten that it is ultimately the people for whom outcomes of research and policy are meant. And that is reflected in its efforts to involve the people at various levels in its policy dialogues. It has played and continues to play a role in raising the awareness of people at the local level and in encouraging them to participate in debates on important policy issues—be it political, economic or social. The ease with which they move between thinking globally and acting locally is quite remarkable.

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Fiercely independent in its outlook, stance, and work, CPD has built up a reputation for objectivity in whatever work it does. This is a major asset of the organization, but it is not without its predicaments. Whenever it has come to debates and discussions at the policy level, its critical analysis has drawn the ire of the sitting governments irrespective of the party in power. It is a measure of the courage and determination of the organization and its professionals that it has never hesitated to express views that clashed with those of the establishment.

I am happy that I have been able to work together with CPD in some capacity or the other. My first direct interaction with it was when I was an ILO official; and on behalf of the ILO, I coordinated a collaborative research project. During that period, I was impressed to see how seriously research was taken by the organization and its researchers. In fact, that was perhaps one of the earliest, and to my knowledge, only model-based empirical work on the impact of trade liberalization on employment in Bangladesh.

After my retirement from the ILO, the scope of my interaction and collaboration with the CPD became broader. On the one hand, I got opportunities to review and comment on its work in progress through periodic 'expert group meetings'. I also undertook peer-reviews of their technical publications. Through such involvements, I could see their commitment to serious and rigorous research.

Over time my interaction with the CPD has gone well beyond involvement in the activities of the organization to interaction in my own research work. Whenever I sought to benefit from the technical expertise and views of the researchers—be it in getting a draft paper read and commented upon or in getting inputs for my research—I was never disappointed. I recall with a degree of pride that on a couple of occasions I was called upon to contribute to their research publications.

For human beings, a thirty-year old is considered to be young. I would say the same thing about CPD and hope that it will forge ahead with even more confident and determined strides. Development community will continue to appreciate its work and will benefit from them.

30 Years of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) *A Brief Recollection of My Association*

I am pleased to know that CPD is celebrating 30 years of its establishment this year. CPD is the first non-governmental institution which took up the responsibility of bringing together policymakers, officials responsible for implementation of policies and analysts of diverse background with the objectives of ensuring rational policy formulation and effective implementation. I had the privilege of being associated with CPD in several ways. A brief recollection of this association follows:

- i. One channel of my association has been interaction with senior executives of CPD. I should make particular mention of *Professor Rehman Sobhan* (founder of CPD), *Dr Debapriya*, *Dr Mustafiz* and *Dr Fahmida*. These interactions helped me to better understand various development issues and formulate rational views.
- ii. The second channel of my association has been participation in seminars, expert group meetings and dialogues organized by CPD. I specially recall pre budget and post budget discussions on the two budgets (FY2007-08 and FY2008-09) that I presented to the nation in my capacity as Adviser, Caretaker Government in charge of the Ministry of Finance.

The other topics of discussions in which I have been involved with CPD include:



Dr A B Mirza Azizul Islam

Former Adviser, Caretaker Government

Ministries of Finance and Planning

Professor, Business School, BRAC University

- Revenue collection
- Sectoral allocation in budgets
- Budget implementation capacity of the administrative machinery
- Capital market
- Private investment
- Foreign direct investment
- Social safety net
- Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations
- Challenges that Bangladesh will face after graduation from least developed country category
- Financial sector problems, especially loan default
- Measuring multi-dimensional poverty
- Creation of more and decent jobs
- Fiscal support for loss making state-owned enterprises
- Illicit outflow of money
- Foreign trade

iii. There have been other forms of my contact with CPD. At one point, the Government of Maldives requested UNESCAP, of which I was Director of Research, for technical assistance in the preparation of one of their development plans. At my request *Professor Rehman Sobhan* agreed to lead the assistance. *Professor Sobhan* also kindly gave his consent to be a member of the Advisory Board of Asia Pacific Development Journal (published by UNESCAP), of which I was the Chief Editor. CPD organized a seminar on the eve of the adoption of floating exchange rate policy. I was a lead panelist in that seminar along with *Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed*, who was the Governor of Bangladesh Bank at that time. *Late Mr Saifur Rahman*, the Finance Minister at that time, was the chief guest. I did not support

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floating exchange rate policy, but *Dr Fakhruddin* supported it. *Mr Saifur Rahman* agreed with my views, but eventually succumbed to the pressure from IMF and the floating exchange rate (with active intervention by the Central Bank) was adopted. My presentation was published as a paper titled 'Exchange rate policy of Bangladesh: Not floating does not mean sinking' was published in *Asia-Pacific Development Journal* vol. 6, No 2, December 2002. Incidentally I was not the Chief Editor at that time.

I have been a member of the team responsible for preparation of several issues of 'A Review of Bangladesh's Development' published by CPD. 2002 issue of this publication contained a paper by me titled 'The impact of exchange rate changes on selected economic indicators in Bangladesh' and 2003 issue included a paper by me titled 'The macroeconomic dimensions of aid dependence:

CPD launched a few issues of *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific* published by UNESCAP. I was a discussant in those events.

iv. Concluding observations: The above paragraphs are by no means a complete listing of my interactions with CPD. As an organization it is reputed for its research and objective analysis of diverse policy issues which are of great relevance to sustained economic development of Bangladesh.

In this 30th year of establishment of CPD, I wish the organization continued success in its mission.

Felicitations on CPD's 30th Anniversary

The Centre for Policy Dialogue started its journey as a policy think tank back in 1993 with a series of sectoral workshops held over many weeks. At the time I had the privilege of participating in the sectoral workshop on information and communication technologies and contributing to the policy recommendations for the sector. The recommendations from the workshops were compiled and published by the CPD in multiple volumes and presented to government. These were most likely the very first of its kind as a methodical and comprehensive set of policy guidance put together outside of the government.

Since then, the CPD has maintained a constant presence in national policy dialogues particularly on economic governance issues. Founded by *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, an economics scholar of international acclaim, the CPD has attracted many prominent economists and governance experts to join its ranks and become a highly regarded policy institution.

On its 30th anniversary I wish the CPD continued success in its institutional journey and at the same time wish its illustrious founder and team members best of health and long life.

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Habibullah N Karim

Founder & CEO, Technohaven Co Ltd
Senior Vice President, Metropolitan Chamber of
Commerce & Industry, Dhaka (MCCI)
Co-founder and Former President, Bangladesh Association
of Software & Information Services (BASIS)

Reflections on the 30th Anniversary of CPD

As CPD celebrates its 30th anniversary, it is a pleasure and privilege to share some of my thoughts about this remarkable institution, which is known for its deep impact on the policy landscape of Bangladesh and beyond. CPD's evolution, from its early days as a fledgling think tank to the influential and respected organization it is today, has been impressive. One of its defining characteristics has been its ability to adapt to the changing needs and challenges of our times. In an era of rapid globalization and technological innovation, CPD has consistently produced cutting-edge research focusing on critical issues facing Bangladesh and the South Asian region. Its reports and publications have not only informed policymakers but have also served as valuable resources for academics, civil society, and international partners. CPD's contribution extends beyond research, papers and policy briefs. It has actively engaged with stakeholders from various sectors including the grassroots, fostering dialogues and collaborations that have led to evidence-based policy changes. Its initiatives have been instrumental in strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring that the voices of citizens are heard in the policymaking process. Whether it is advocating for economic reforms, pushing for sustainable development, or promoting democratic governance, CPD has been at the forefront of important conversations that shape our country.



Dr Sumaiya Khair

Professor of Law, University of Dhaka and
Adviser, Executive Management, Transparency
International Bangladesh (TIB)

I have had the privilege of being associated with CPD in various capacities at various times of its journey—as member of pre-election Task Force/Expert Group to help prepare policy briefs (2001, 2023), as Fellow working on issues of child labour and development (2002-03), as consultant for developing thematic policy brief to assist the Ministry of Home Affairs, GoB (2012), and as member of its Audit Committee (2015-2021). I have greatly enjoyed and learnt from each experience, benefitting immensely both personally and professionally. I am especially grateful to Debapriya Bhai, Mustafiz Bhai, Fatema Apa, Fahmida, Moazzem and other CPD colleagues with whom I had the opportunity to interact for their warmth, friendship and generous hospitality. It is a joy to recall our many conversations, both serious and light-hearted, over endless cups of tea and scrumptious food, filled with fun and banter, but none ever compromising on professional ethos.

The importance of think tanks like CPD cannot be overemphasized. In a world confronted with complex challenges, evidence-based policy solutions are more critical than ever. I am confident that CPD will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping the socio-economic and political landscape of Bangladesh and in the region. I extend my heartfelt congratulations to CPD on reaching this significant milestone and am grateful for giving me the opportunity to be a part of its incredible journey.

I look forward to witnessing the continued impact and success of CPD in the coming years!

CPD's contribution extends beyond research, papers and policy briefs. It has actively engaged with stakeholders from various sectors including the grassroots, fostering dialogues and collaborations that have led to evidence-based policy changes. Its initiatives have been instrumental in strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring that the voices of citizens are heard in the policymaking process.

A Pillar of Progress

Bangladesh has progressed in leaps and bounds in the past three decades. Our GDP per capita has grown tenfold since 1993. Manufacturing output is 20 times higher today than back then. Child mortality has dropped to a quarter of what it was. Society and institutions have evolved, and both the country and the region have grown more connected.

It takes many factors to make progress, and to ensure that the progress is equitable; translating to real, meaningful improvement in the living standards across all sections of society. From two decades of experience as the founder of Friendship, an organization that works to bring opportunity and hope to the most hard-to-reach and unaddressed, climate-impacted communities in the country, I can say this: regardless of the intention of the government and policymakers; true, meaningful progress is impossible without closely and deeply listening to the voices of all different demographics of the population, and also impossible without achieving a robust understanding of the society and the problems we need to solve. In other words, knowledge acquisition and research are the pillars of progress.

There are many brilliant scholars and researchers dedicated to the research and study of different aspects of society. Throughout its long history, Bengal (and subsequently Bangladesh), have had its share of



Runa Khan

Founder & Executive Director
Friendship

stellar academics, thinkers and writers helping us learn and deeply understand our society and its problems. But too often, this research and study has remained confined to the ivory tower, never seeing the light of day in the practical world. This is why, it is truly important as a practitioner on the field, to be called upon to write for and with an establishment like the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

Academic knowledge translated into actions are needed for the immense challenges of the world today.

Consistently, for thirty years, under successive governments—elected, transitional, and military, oftentimes in an atmosphere of polarity and confrontation, CPD has played a uniting role, bringing together policymakers, politicians, entrepreneurs, researchers, academics, journalists, the civil society and the voices of ordinary people to inform and influence governance and development, and the trajectory of the nation's growth.

By doing so, they have nurtured a culture of healthy, honest dialogue, which has fueled the policy changes and governance that was needed for Bangladesh to move forward in the twenty-first century. This has allowed the work of researchers and academics to translate into policy, and through policy into real positive change in society.

Not only has CPD persisted regardless of the prevailing political power, or its ideology, they have managed remain uninfluenced by either politics or funders. No funder has been able to dictate CPD's discourse. As a social entrepreneur working in hard-to-reach areas, I know that this can be difficult at the best of times. Donors always have their own interests in contributing to research or any other project. But CPD's research

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is always on point, and addressing real, immediate issues sincerely and without bias. This has made them a trusted and respected voice, nationally and internationally.

They have made relevant and timely policy recommendations on every important subject, ranging from rural and agricultural economy to food security, to the environment, to foreign and regional policy, to law and order. Perhaps CPD is most famous for its 'Independent Review of the Bangladesh's Development (IRBD)' every year, by the foremost economists within the country. Before this review became available, the only yearly review of the economy was done by the World Bank.

Another important lesson for me, in my work as a social entrepreneur, has been how easy it is for certain voices—the women, the poor, the minorities, the social outcasts—to be glazed over in any consultation process, and how it is actually most essential for these voices to be heard in the decision-making process. This is another area where CPD's work is so vital. Through rigorous research, they have brought forward many voices who were otherwise unrepresented in the media or in governance to the policymakers and ensured that they are heard.

Research is an indispensable asset when it comes to the progress of a nation. It fuels debate, it highlights new issues, and creates knowledge. It stimulates public discourse through media and civil society, and enables governance through multi-stakeholder, participatory processes. Thirty years of service to the country has been invaluable, but I wish that CPD continues this work far into the future and continues to inspire and support researchers and academics to do this excellent work.

The people who gather knowledge give the government, and indeed all development organisations, entrepreneurs and civil society, one of the most important pillars upon which to build a nation. It is they who ensure that nobody is left behind, or trampled under the engines of progress. It is they who give us the tools to ensure that our work has a meaningful and sustainable impact.

CPD must continue their work, and I offer its founder *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, its executive directors and teams who have worked over the

years my deepest appreciation. You have my hearties felicitations and support the coming years to CPD.

সিপিডি'র ৩০ বছর পূর্তিতে শুভেচ্ছা

সিপিডি'র সঙ্গে আমার সম্পর্ক বহু বছরের। ১৯৯৫ সালের জুলাই মাসে ফেমা (ফেয়ার ইলেকশান মিনিটরিং এলায়েন্স) গঠিত হয় গণতন্ত্র ও বাংলাদেশের নির্বাচন প্রক্রিয়াকে শক্তিশালী করার লক্ষ্যে। সংগঠনটির অন্যতম ভাইস প্রেসিডেন্ট হিসাবে তখন থেকেই আমার যোগাযোগ হয় সিপিডি'র সঙ্গে। সেই সময় সিপিডি তাদের বহুবিধ কার্যক্রমের মধ্যে দেশের সামগ্রিক উন্নয়নের স্বার্থে নেয়া প্রকল্পগুলির মধ্যে গণতন্ত্রকে শক্তিশালী করার লক্ষ্যে প্রয়োজনীয় আলোচনা, পর্যালোচনা ও গবেষণাও চালাচ্ছিল। ফেমার অনেক প্রোগ্রামে, আলোচনা সভায়, সেমিনারে সিপিডিকে তখন আমাদের পাশে পেয়েছি। দেশের অন্যতম প্রভাবশালী থিংক ট্যাঙ্ক হিসাবে সিপিডি ততদিনে দেশে ও বিদেশে সুনাম অর্জন করেছে। ফেমাও দেশে ও দেশের বাইরে অন্যান্য বহু দেশে নির্বাচন পর্যবেক্ষণ ও নানাবিধ গণতন্ত্র বিষয়ক সেমিনার, ওয়ার্কশপ এর অভিজ্ঞতা সিপিডি'র সঙ্গেও শেয়ার করতে পেরেছে।

ফেমার ভাইস প্রেসিডেন্ট হিসাবে এবং ২০০৩ সাল থেকে প্রেসিডেন্ট হিসাবে সিপিডি তাদের প্রায় প্রতিটি প্রোগ্রামে আমাকে আমন্ত্রণ জানিয়েছে - কখনও পারটিসিপেন্ট হিসাবে, কখনও অতিথি হিসাবে। তবে আমার সর্বক্ষেত্রেই মনে হয়েছে আমি সিপিডি'র একজন। নির্বাচন পর্যবেক্ষণ ছাড়াও আমি কয়েকটি স্বেচ্ছাসেবামূলক সংগঠনের সঙ্গে জড়িত থেকে বিশেষ করে শারীরিক প্রতিবন্ধী ও দৃষ্টি প্রতিবন্ধীব্যক্তিদের জন্য, মানবাধিকার, নারী ও শিশুদের অধিকার অর্জনের জন্য কাজে নিজেকে সম্পৃক্ত করেছিলাম। সেখানে উন্নয়ন সংক্রান্ত সিপিডি'র গবেষণা আলোচনা আমাকে অনেক দিক নির্দেশনা দিয়েছে। শুধুমাত্র ব্যক্তিগতভাবে সাহায্য করা ছাড়া অন্যান্য উপায়েও মানব উন্নয়নের কথা চিন্তা করতে পেরেছি এবং কাজে লাগাতে পেরেছি আমার কর্মক্ষেত্রে। আমার নিজের বিচারে সিপিডি হচ্ছে উদাহরণযোগ্য একটি প্রতিষ্ঠান যেখানে একশত ভাগ সততার সঙ্গে, কমিটমেন্টের



মুনিরা খান
প্রেসিডেন্ট, ফেমা

সঙ্গে সত্য প্রকাশের ম্যানডেট নিয়ে কাজ করা হয়। নির্দিধায়, নির্ভয়ে তাদের মতামত প্রকাশ করে যেটা সবার কাছে গ্রহণযোগ্যতা পায়। তাই আমি এই প্রবীণ বয়সেও তাদের প্রোগ্রামে, আলোচনা সভায় উপস্থিত থাকতে চেষ্টা করি, মতপ্রকাশ করতে চেষ্টা করি - সদস্য না হয়েও সম্পৃক্ত থাকতে সচেষ্ট হই। সিপিডি'র সঙ্গে আমার এই সম্পৃক্ততা আমার জীবনে এক অর্থপূর্ণ অধ্যায়।

সিপিডি অত্যন্ত সাফল্য ও সুনামের সঙ্গে আজ ৩০ বছর তাদের কার্যক্রম পরিচালনা করে আসছে। আমি এই সংগঠনের ৩০ বছর পূর্তির আনন্দের শরীক। আমি তাদের অভিনন্দন জানাই।

দেশকে এবং দেশের মানুষকে সবকিছুর উপরে রেখে নির্ভিক চিন্তাভাবনা, গবেষণা এবং মতামত প্রকাশের এই উদ্যোগ, দিকনির্দেশনা দেয়া যেন অনাগত দিনগুলিতেও দেশবাসীর প্রাপ্তি থাকে, এই প্রত্যাশা করি।

সিপিডি অত্যন্ত সাফল্য ও সুনামের সঙ্গে আজ ৩০ বছর তাদের কার্যক্রম পরিচালনা করে আসছে। আমি এই সংগঠনের ৩০ বছর পূর্তির আনন্দের শরীক। আমি তাদের অভিনন্দন জানাই।

সিপিডি'র ৩০ বছর পূর্তিতে শুভেচ্ছা

সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগ (সিপিডি) একটি নিরপেক্ষ গবেষণা সংস্থা যা দেশের অর্থনীতি নিয়ে গবেষণা করে এবং সবসময় একটি নিরপেক্ষ ভাবমূর্তি ধরে রাখার চেষ্টা করে থাকে। এই প্রতিষ্ঠানটি প্রতিষ্ঠার শুরু থেকেই সরকারের গৃহীত বিভিন্ন নীতিমালা, কর্মকাণ্ড ও উদ্যোগগুলো জনজীবনের কতটুকু পরিবর্তন আনে তা নিয়ে আলোচনা ও সমালোচনার মাধ্যমে গণতান্ত্রিক সরকারের দেওয়া বাজেট ও বিভিন্ন বাণিজ্যিক পদক্ষেপের বিষয়ে জবাবদিহিতা নিশ্চিত করতে কাজ করে আসছে। প্রফেসর রেহমান সোবহান বিশ্বব্যাপী এবং বাংলাদেশের অর্থনৈতিক পরিবর্তনগুলোর সাথে সাথে একটি অংশগ্রহণমূলক উন্নয়ন প্রক্রিয়া নিশ্চিত করার জন্য একটি প্ল্যাটফর্মের প্রয়োজনীয়তা অনুভব করেছিলেন। বিশেষ করে, এমন একটি প্ল্যাটফর্ম প্রতিষ্ঠার প্রয়োজনীয়তা অনুভব করেন যেখানে সরকারের নীতির মূল্যায়নের পাশাপাশি তা প্রভাবিত করার জন্যে স্টেকহোল্ডারদের সম্পৃক্ততা নিশ্চিত করা যাবে। সুতরাং, বাংলাদেশে একটি অংশগ্রহণমূলক, অন্তর্ভুক্তিমূলক এবং জবাবদিহিমূলক উন্নয়ন প্রক্রিয়াকে এগিয়ে নিতে সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগ (সিপিডি) প্রতিষ্ঠিত হয়েছিল।

সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগ (সিপিডি) এমন একটি নেতৃত্বান্বিত গবেষণা প্রতিষ্ঠান যা সংলাপের মাধ্যমে আঞ্চলিক ও বৈশ্বিক অর্থনৈতিক একীকরণ করার জন্যে কাজ করে আসছে। এছাড়াও (সিপিডি) সমতা, ন্যায়বিচার, ন্যায্যতা এবং সুশাসনের উপর ভিত্তি করে একটি অন্তর্ভুক্তিমূলক সমাজ গঠনে এবং জবাবদিহিমূলক উন্নয়ন প্রক্রিয়া নিশ্চিত করার জন্য গবেষণা, সংলাপ, প্রচার এবং অ্যাডভোকেসির মাধ্যমে সরকারের নীতি-নির্ধারণকে প্রভাবিত করে থাকে।



ড. ওয়াজেদুল ইসলাম খান
সাধারণ সম্পাদক
বাংলাদেশ ট্রেড ইউনিয়ন কেন্দ্র

সিপিডি অর্থনীতিক নীতি বিশ্লেষণের জন্য জাতীয় সক্ষমতা বৃদ্ধি করা; দারিদ্র্য বিমোচন, বাণিজ্য ও বিনিয়োগ সুযোগ সৃষ্টির জন্য আঞ্চলিক সহযোগিতা বৃদ্ধি; বিশ্বায়নের প্রক্রিয়ায় বাংলাদেশের কার্যকরী পদক্ষেপ নেওয়া এবং জনগণের অংশগ্রহণমূলক নীতি-নির্ধারণে অবদান রাখার জন্য সহায়ক ভূমিকা পালন করতে প্রতিশ্রুতিবদ্ধ।

সিপিডি বাংলাদেশের সামষ্টিক অর্থনীতির উপর গবেষণা ও বিশ্লেষণ করে, সংলাপ সংগঠিত করে, প্রকাশনা বের করে, এবং সংশ্লিষ্ট স্টেকহোল্ডারদের সক্ষমতা বৃদ্ধিতে সহায়তা করে। পাশাপাশি জাতীয় বাজেটের জন্য বিশ্লেষণ ও সুপারিশ তৈরি করে।

সিপিডি'র গবেষণা নীতি পরিবর্তন এবং উদ্যোগগুলিতে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ অবদান রেখেছে যা সুশাসন, সুষ্ঠু অর্থনৈতিক ব্যবস্থাপনা এবং সমাজের প্রান্তিক গোষ্ঠীর স্বার্থের সুরক্ষা নিশ্চিত করতে সহযোগিতা করে।

যদিও আমরা দেখতে পাই যে সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগের মত একটি নেতৃস্থানীয় গবেষণা প্রতিষ্ঠান শ্রমিকদের স্বার্থ সংশ্লিষ্ট বিভিন্ন বিষয়ে সরকারের, বিভিন্ন নীতিমালা প্রণয়ন ও বাস্তবায়নে সমালোচনা করতে কম আগ্রহ দেখায়। সিপিডির কাছে আমাদের প্রত্যাশা এই যে ভবিষ্যতে সিপিডি শ্রমিকদের স্বার্থ সংশ্লিষ্ট বিষয়গুলো নিয়ে সরকার গৃহীত ও মালিকপক্ষের বিভিন্ন নীতিমালা এবং কর্মকাণ্ড শ্রমিকদের জীবনে কতটুকু পরিবর্তন আনে তা নিরসনে সিপিডি উল্লেখযোগ্য ভূমিকা পালন করবে।

সিপিডি'র গবেষণা নীতি পরিবর্তন এবং উদ্যোগগুলিতে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ অবদান রেখেছে যা সুশাসন, সুষ্ঠু অর্থনৈতিক ব্যবস্থাপনা এবং সমাজের প্রান্তিক গোষ্ঠীর স্বার্থের সুরক্ষা নিশ্চিত করতে সহযোগিতা করে।

Celebrating CPD's 30 Years

From National Impact to Regional Integration

My congratulations to the Centre for Policy Dialogue on its 30th Anniversary. The CPD has stood out as one of the premier institutions in South Asia not only because it has been able to generate ideas for economic growth and political stability of Bangladesh, but also due to the crucial role it has been able to play in working towards regional integration in South Asia.

My admiration for the CPD is in part due to the key personalities who made what the organization what it is today. In the beginning, I had the pleasure of working with the then Executive Director of CPD, Professor Rehman Sobhan, when I was co-convenor of the Coalition for Action on South Asian Cooperation (CASAC) with the former Secretary General of SAARC, Kant Bhargava. Professor Sobhan's passion and enthusiasm for the Track II process and activities of civil society in South Asia elevated our work in CASAC several notches higher. With his help, and in collaboration with CPD, CASAC held the meeting of 'The Citizen's Commission for South Asia' in Kathmandu, Nepal, from 1st-3rd December 2000. The former Prime Minister of India, I. K. Gurjral, chaired the meeting, while former Foreign and Finance Minister of Pakistan, *Sartaj Aziz*, served as the Deputy Chair. Others participants in the meeting included then former Finance Minister of India, Manmohan Singh, among others. The Citizen's Commission was able to come out with a set of guidelines that was then implemented by



Professor Sridhar K Khatri

Ambassador for Nepal to the United States of America and
Former Executive Director South Asia Centre for Policy
Studies (SACEPS)

South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS), which was also headed by *Professor Sobhan*.

SACEPS' efficacy was determined by the collective strength of partner institutions in the SAARC member states. The CPD in Bangladesh was the key partner in this endeavor, and during *Professor Sobhan* tenure as the Executive Director, SACEPS was able to prepare the South Asian Social Charter, which paved the way for the official signing of the SAARC Social Charter in 4th January 2004. After I took over SACEPS from Professor Sobhan as the Executive Director, the same network of institutions in South Asia also played a crucial role in drafting the SAARC Democracy Charter: Citizens' Initiative, on 14th October 2011.

The work of the CPD has made an enormous difference in South Asia. I am proud to say that I have had the pleasure of working closely with some of those key movers and shakers of that institution that include not only *Professor Sobhan*, but also its current Distinguished Fellows, *Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya* and Professor Mustafizur Rahman.

The work of the CPD has made an enormous difference in South Asia. I am proud to say that I have had the pleasure of working closely with some of those key movers and shakers of that institution that include not only *Professor Sobhan*, but also its current Distinguished Fellows, *Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya* and Professor Mustafizur Rahman.

An Intellectual Giant for Regional Development *Some Thoughts for CPD@30*

CPD has emerged over the past decades not only as a premier think tank on development issues in Bangladesh but one that is highly visible outside in South Asia and beyond. In my different roles in the past, I have often looked up to CPD for collaborations and consultations on issues of inclusive and sustainable development in Bangladesh and South Asia.

My association with CPD deepened during 2002-09 when I served as the Director-General of Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), New Delhi. CPD had incubated the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS), which was conceived by Professor Rehman Sobhan, together with his friends from different South Asian countries, as a network institution bringing together think tanks from five South Asian countries who were committed to the idea of South Asia and regional cooperation. Given its active work programme on South Asia cooperation, RIS was invited to become an institutional member of SACEPS and I was invited to join its Board. In that role, I had the privilege to coordinate one of the task forces of SACEPS and host one of its Board Meetings and some of its policy roundtables at RIS.

Gradually the institution-building for South Asian think tank cooperation deepened with the launch of the South Asia Development and Cooperation Reports (SADCRs) by RIS and the establishment of the South Asia Economic



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Journal (SAEJ) by RIS and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) of Sri Lanka. CPD has actively supported SADCRs and SAEJ and Professor Sobhan has served on the Editorial Advisory Board of the journal since its inception. Later on, the five South Asian institutions launched a series of South Asia Economic Summits (SAES) in 2008. CPD has hosted three SAES with a great deal of commitment.

My close association with CPD continued even after I joined the UNESCAP in 2009 as its Chief Economist and Director of its Economic Division where I drew upon CPD's expertise and perspective on Bangladesh and South Asia. My association deepened further from December 2011 when I moved to New Delhi to establish the new South and South-West Asia (SSWA) Office of UNESCAP. Professor Sobhan not only graced the opening of the SSWA Office along with Professor Amartya Sen, among other dignitaries of the region, but his remarks provided important guidance to its work. The SSWA Office regularly turned to CPD for collaborations in its different activities including the South Asia SDG Forums. CPD has been an institutional member of the South Asia Network on SDGs established by the UNESCAP's SSWA Office in 2020. My association with CPD continues to grow as I have moved back from UNESCAP in 2021 to head ISID, another policy think tank based in Delhi and build upon our past work.

To sum up, I have watched with great admiration the evolution of CPD over the past decades as one of the most active and effective think tanks of South Asia that has helped to shape the agenda of South Asian identity and cooperation. As CPD celebrates its 30th Anniversary, I wish to congratulate its founder, esteemed Professor Rehman Sobhan, successive Executive Directors namely Deb Bhattacharya, Mustafiz Rehman and Fahmida Khatun, and the whole of the CPD team for their splendid achievements! As the official process of South Asian cooperation passes through a turbulent phase and as Bangladesh assumes a

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new salience in the Bay of Bengal and the Indo-Pacific region, the role of institutions such as CPD becomes even more critical in shaping the policy agenda for sustainable development and cooperation.

CPD

The Institutionalization of Public Reasoning in Bangladesh

This is a common spectacle now. You will see them all lined up at the back of the room—the video cameras resting on their stands. A little logo will tell you which TV channel each belongs to. The camera men and reporters would be loitering around and those without the luxury of a stand would wait patiently with the cameras on their arms. You could judge by the number of cameras how important the event is.

If you have been to one of these events you would know that I am talking about the dialogues of Dhaka—these unique arrangements, a hybrid between a social and a professional event, and now an integral part of Dhaka’s social calendar. The Dhaka dialogues can be on a variety of topics and are now increasingly organized by all sorts of institutions. Some are open and some are by invitation only. The latter are often craved for, as much as the best embassy receptions and the grandest weddings in town.

While many organizations are now arranging such dialogues, the leader in this, and whose name itself suggests it, is the Centre for Policy Dialogue. Known more widely by its acronym, CPD, the Centre was set up in 1993 by the venerable Professor Rehman Sobhan. This year, CPD is celebrating the thirty years of its existence.



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The idea of setting up the CPD came to Professor Rehman Sobhan following his experience with the task forces in 1991. General Ershad had just been ousted by a popular movement which ended his almost ten-year old rule. Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed had succeeded him as interim President and he, and his 10-member council of advisers, had been tasked with the mandate of organizing a free and fair election that would pave the way for a democratic regime after a decade of autocratic and quasi-autocratic rule. Although not officially termed as such, this was effectively the first caretaker government of the country. Professor Sobhan was the adviser in charge of the Planning Ministry.

The council had a limited mandate, but Rehman Sobhan had an eye on the future. ‘I thought that it would be worthwhile to work out a vision of development with specific action plans for the incoming government to implement – this would be our legacy for the new administration’— Professor Sobhan told me about fifteen years ago sitting in the Dhanmondi office of the CPD. He had thought it was a particularly apt thing for him to do given that he held the planning portfolio. The subjects of the task forces covered a wide range—from environment to monetary policy, from the energy sector to reviving the jute industry. Each had several members. The task force members produced valuable reports on their assigned topics. The substantial effort was entirely voluntary. Not a single dime was paid to these top-notch experts, every hour of whose time would have fetched a hefty fee had they been in the consulting mode. These reports were subsequently published in four volumes by the University Press Limited.

‘The experience with the Task Forces in 1991 had a profound impact on me’— Professor Sobhan told me, ‘It confirmed the existence of a huge reservoir of knowledge and expertise which could be mobilized at relatively low cost for the service of the nation. This had inspired me.’ But the inspiration was part of the story; there was concern too. Professor Sobhan continued: ‘At the same time, I was struck by the degree to which the many years of autocratic rule had created a culture of intolerance, and an indifference to dialogue and pursuit of consensus on important national issues.’

Two years after this experience, Professor Rehman Sobhan established the Centre for Policy Dialogue in 1993. The CPD’s website declares in no unclear terms what led to its creation and what motivates its work. ‘CPD’s activism

originates from a conviction that it is hardly possible to promote the effective governance needed for a successful implementation of development policies without establishing domestic ownership over our policy agendas. We believe that loss of ownership over national policy agendas to our principal aid donors was an important factor in the deterioration in the quality of governance in Bangladesh.'

Sound policymaking requires a certain degree of policy discourse in a country, where various stakeholders diagnose problems through solid research and come up with policy positions which they then present and defend in front of other stakeholders. A healthy debate and dialogue, and input from a wide range of stakeholders, provides government with rich guidance on how to proceed and an assurance that the policy actions will enjoy a reasonable degree of support. It also provides strong signals to government about the expectations from society; signals that a democratic government will find it difficult to ignore.

On the evening of the dialogue, as they sit in front of their TVs or browse the internet, or next morning as they read their newspapers, those unable to come to the dialogue will get a flavor of what was discussed. The Dhaka dialogues (and now increasingly those outside Dhaka also) have indeed played an important role in building awareness of many important social and economic issues. Not only people who participate, but also those who learn about it through the media, will often discuss these in the many addas, weddings and receptions that go on in Dhaka city every week, and in tea stalls, press clubs and newspaper offices in small town Bangladesh.

Through these unofficial, impromptu chats, the word will spread. Sitting in his office in Dhanmondi, or his home in Gulshan, Professor Rehman Sobhan will not be privy to these conversations, but he will know that, throughout the country these mini dialogues are helping to realize, at least partially, that vision of popular participation in policy related discussions that had inspired him to start the CPD dialogues.

The CPD dialogues have achieved a lot. But quite a bit of the promise has remained unfulfilled. Talking to me fifteen years ago, Professor Sobhan lamented several things—the declining interest in informed policymaking among policymakers and politicians, the many distractions of the

The CPD dialogues were premised on the need to bring together all stakeholders in a policy issue, spell out the key issues around which there was contestation and to seek resolution to conflictual issues by encouraging participants to talk with each other rather than at each other.

professional classes which are preventing them from being serious participants at the dialogues, the scarcity of single-issue advocates who are willing to doggedly pursue a single set of issues till they are satisfactorily resolved, and the continuing schism between researchers and policymakers. Sadly, much of this is true even now.

The original idea was to help bring the research work and findings of other people, such as the think tanks, to the public domain. These findings were to inform public debate and hopefully have an impact on policy. However, at one stage CPD started carrying out its own research. Was this a good strategy? Carrying out effective dialogue processes is not easy. Did CPD dilute its capacity to carry out effective dialogue by diverting attention to research?

CPD has built excellent relations with the media. Its dialogues are often the lead story in the media. This has helped generate widespread awareness of the issues raised in the dialogues. This has also encouraged a proliferation of dialogues organized by other organizations. But there is a flip side to this. Such huge publicity has often generated discontent in politicians, especially those belonging to an incumbent government. Would CPD have had a greater impact on policy if it had kept a low profile? Is CPD better off having a significant impact on societal awareness even at the cost of being ignored by policy makers?

As CPD enters the fourth decade of its existence, these are some of the questions that we may ponder upon.

সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগ প্রতিষ্ঠার তিন দশক পূর্তি উপলক্ষে শুভেচ্ছা বার্তা

সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগ (সিপিডি)-এর প্রতিষ্ঠালগ্ন থেকে ২০০৬ সালের জুলাই মাসে যুক্তরাষ্ট্রে অভিবাসী হবার আগ পর্যন্ত প্রতিষ্ঠানটির সঙ্গে আমার ছিল নিবিড় সম্পর্ক। আমার প্রিয় শিক্ষক, অধ্যাপক রেহমান সোবহান, ১৯৬৯-৭০ শিক্ষাবর্ষে যিনি ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের অর্থনীতি বিভাগে আমাদের ‘পাকিস্তানের অর্থনীতি’ পড়ানোর মাধ্যমে দেশের অর্থনীতির প্রকৃত অবস্থা বুঝতে সাহায্য করেছিলেন, একমাত্র টিউটোরিয়াল ক্লাসের মাধ্যমে যিনি আমাদের গবেষণাকর্মে উদ্বুদ্ধ করেছিলেন, গণআন্দোলনের মাধ্যমে ১৯৯০ সালের ডিসেম্বরে স্বৈরাচারের পতনের পর গঠিত তত্ত্বাবধায়ক সরকারের উপদেষ্টা হিসেবে দায়িত্ব নেবার পর যাঁর আহবানে সাঁড়া দিয়ে নানা ক্ষেত্রে দেশের বিশিষ্ট জনসমৃদ্ধ নানা বিষয়ক টাস্ক ফোর্সের অন্যতম, অধ্যাপক মোজাফফর আহমদের নেতৃত্বে গঠিত শিক্ষা সংক্রান্ত টাস্ক ফোর্সের সদস্য সচিবের দায়িত্ব পালন করেছিলাম, তাঁরই উদ্যোগে ১৯৯৩ সালে দেশের উন্নয়ন সহায়ক একটি প্রতিষ্ঠান হিসেবে সিপিডি যখন আত্মপ্রকাশ করলো, সঙ্গত কারণেই অত্যন্ত আনন্দিত হয়েছিলাম। পরবর্তী এক দশকেরও বেশী সময়, প্রতিষ্ঠানটির নানাবিধ কর্মকাণ্ডে জড়িত ছিলাম। অংশগ্রহণ করেছি সিপিডি আয়োজিত অসংখ্য সেমিনার, কর্মশালা এবং পরামর্শ সভায়। সমৃদ্ধ হয়েছি সিপিডি-এর নানাবিধ প্রকাশনা, বিশেষ করে এর বাৎসরিক আয়োজন, Independent Review of Bangladesh Development’s থেকে। সময় ও সুযোগ পেলে অবদানও রেখেছি এসবের কোনটিতে। প্রাথমিকভাবে, দেশের অভ্যন্তরীণ নানা সমস্যা নিরূপণ ও সমাধানে ব্রতী হলেও পরবর্তীকালে প্রতিষ্ঠানটির কর্ম পরিধি প্রসারিত হয়েছে আঞ্চলিক ও বৈশ্বিক পরিমন্ডলে। তিন দশকের পথ পরিক্রমায়, সিপিডি বর্তমানে উন্নীত হয়েছে একটি আন্তর্জাতিক খ্যাতিসম্পন্ন উন্নয়ন গবেষণা প্রতিষ্ঠানে। আমি প্রতিষ্ঠানটির উত্তরোত্তর সমৃদ্ধি কামনা করি।



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সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগ (সিপিডি) এ বছর তাদের পথ চলার ত্রিশ বছর পূর্তি পালন করতে যাচ্ছে। এটা নিঃসন্দেহে একটি সফল যাত্রার পরিতৃপ্তি ও স্বীকৃতি অন্তত সেই সমাজ, দেশ ও অর্থনীতিতে যেখানে কৃতকর্মের নির্মোহ গবেষণা পর্যালোচনা বিশ্লেষণ অনুধাবনে বশংবদ সীমাবদ্ধতা বিদ্যমান, সেই রাজনৈতিক—আর্থ-সামাজিক সংস্কৃতিতে যেখানে পক্ষে বললে আপনি প্রশংসা পাবেন আর বিপক্ষে বললে আপনি রোষানলে পড়তে পারেন। অর্থাৎ মন্দকে ভাল না বললে পক্ষপাতিত্বের অপবাদ মিলাটা স্বাভাবিক আর যেখানে যে কারোরই নিরপেক্ষ অবস্থানে টেকসই হতে পারা বা টিকে থাকতে পারাটাই বেশ চ্যালেঞ্জিং। সিপিডি চ্যালেঞ্জটি গ্রহণ ও আত্মস্থ করতে পিছ পা হয়নি, এখানেই সিপিডি'র সমুজ্জল স্বাতন্ত্র্য। সিপিডি সব সময়ে সঠিক বিশ্লেষণ করতে পেরেছে এটা শতভাগ নিশ্চয়ন করা সম্ভব না হলেও সিপিডি স্বাধীন নিরপেক্ষ পর্যালোচনায় যতদূর সম্ভব স্থিরপ্রাজ্ঞ থাকতে চেয়েছে, পেরেছে।

এটা অনস্বীকার্য যে বাংলাদেশের নেতৃস্থানীয় সুশীল সমাজ প্রতিষ্ঠানের সমর্থনে, সিপিডি বাংলাদেশের উদীয়মান সুশীল সমাজ থেকে উদ্ভূত ক্রমবর্ধমান চাহিদা পূরণের জন্য নিরন্তর কাজ করছে। একটি ট্রাস্টের মাধ্যম সিপিডি পরিচালিত হয় যাতে একে আরও অংশগ্রহণ এবং জবাবদিহিমূলক করা যায়। সিপিডি প্রান্তিক স্টেকহোল্ডারদের দৃষ্টিকোণ থেকে তাদের অনুভূত-প্রয়োজনকে তুলে ধরার চেষ্টা করে। এ ক্ষেত্রে সিপিডির ভূমিকা হল সংশ্লিষ্ট নীতি প্রণয়নের প্রক্রিয়ার মাধ্যমে মাল্টিস্টেক হোল্ডার পরামর্শ সংগঠিত করা, জাতীয়, আঞ্চলিক এবং বৈশ্বিক স্বার্থের বিষয়ে সমালোচনামূলক গবেষণা পরিচালনা করা এবং মূল উন্নয়নমূলক বিষয়ে জ্ঞান ও তথ্য প্রচারের মাধ্যমে প্রভাবিত করার মধ্যে সীমিত ও সীমাবদ্ধ না থাকা।



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সাবেক সদস্য, পরিকল্পনা কমিশন
সাবেক চেয়ারম্যান, জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ড

লক্ষ্যনীয় যে সিপিডি'র ৩০ বছর পথচলার মধ্যে ৫০ শতাংশ পরপর দু'টি গণতান্ত্রিক সরকারসহ তিনটি তত্ত্বাবধায়ক সরকার (একটি আবার দু'বছর ব্যাপী সেনাসমর্থিত) এবং বাকী ৫০ শতাংশ সময় একটানা বর্তমান সরকারের আমলে কেটেছে। প্রথমার্ধে পরপর দু'টি গণতান্ত্রিক সরকার পরমত সহিষ্ণুতায় যতটা আন্তরিকতা থাকার চেষ্টায় ছিল শেষার্ধের সরকারের অব্যাহত আমলে পরমত ও সমালোচনা সহিষ্ণুতার ক্ষেত্রে আন্তরিক বা অন্তর্ভুক্তির প্রবনতা ততটা মেলেনি। তবে শেষার্ধে সিপিডি চিন্তা চৌবাচ্চা হিসেবে বেশ কিছু বিষয়ভিত্তিক পরীক্ষা পর্যালোচনার আওতা ক্রমশ: বাড়িয়েছে, একই টেবিলে নীতিনির্ধারক ও বিরোধী পক্ষকেও সম্পৃক্ত করতে সক্ষম হয়েছে। সিপিডি গণতান্ত্রিক মূল্যবোধ ও আবহ উন্নয়ন অভিযাত্রায় পথের বাধা গুলো সনাক্ত যেমন করতে চেয়েছে, সেসূত্রে জনমত বিশেষ করে চিন্তক মহলে ভাবনার খোরাক যোগাতে উদ্যোগ নিয়েছে। নীতি নির্ধারণের প্রধান কর্মশালা জাতীয় সংসদকে পাশ কাটিয়ে কিংবা জনপ্রতিনিধিদের নির্লিপ্ততায় কিংবা তাদের স্বেচ্ছা নির্বাসনে রেখে জাতীয় স্বার্থ পরিপন্থী পদক্ষেপ গ্রহণের উপায় উপলক্ষ কিভাবে তৈরী হয়েছে এবং তাতে ক্ষমতার স্বেচ্ছাচারিতার উদ্ভব ও বিকাশে কিভাবে খাত ও ক্ষেত্র ভেদে সুশাসন ও জবাবদিহি পরিবেশ পয়মল হয়েছে তা তুলে ধরতে সিপিডি নিরন্তর প্রয়াস ও প্রচেষ্টা চালিয়েছে। আমার নিজের অধিক্ষেত্র রাজস্ব আহরণ ব্যবস্থাপনা নিয়ে সিপিডি বেশ কয়েকটি বিশেষ পর্যালোচনা করেছে যার দ্বারা রাজস্ব অর্থনীতি ও প্রশাসন উপকৃত হয়েছে। ইদানীং সিপিডি তাদের সমালোচনার ধারা ও প্রক্ষেপণে কিছুটা পরিবর্তন আনতে পেরেছে। বার্ষিক সম্মেলন এবং মুখ্য খাতভিত্তিক অনলাইন গুচ্ছ আলোচনাকে দেশ বিদেশে প্রচারিত প্রসারিত করতে পেরেছে।

সিপিডি স্থানীয়ভাবে এবং বিশ্বব্যাপী প্রচারসহ একটি স্বাধীন কার্যক্রম গ্রহণ করে থাকে। বর্তমান প্রেক্ষাপটে বাংলাদেশ, দক্ষিণ এশিয়া ও স্বল্পোন্নত দেশগুলির উন্নয়ন প্রক্রিয়ার জন্য গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা পালন করে এবং মধ্যমেয়াদী দৃষ্টিকোণ থেকে দেশের উন্নয়ন সম্ভাবনাকে গঠন ও প্রভাবিত করতে প্রত্যাশিত সমস্যাগুলির উপর সিপিডি ফোকাস করে। সিপিডি-এর বর্তমান প্রোগ্রাম পোর্টফোলিওর মধ্যে রয়েছে গবেষণা কার্যক্রম, সংলাপ, প্রকাশনা ও প্রচার, এবং নেটওয়ার্কিং সম্পর্কিত উদ্যোগ। সিপিডি জাতীয় অর্থনীতির নীতি বিশ্লেষণ, আঞ্চলিক সহযোগিতা বৃদ্ধি, আঞ্চলিকীকরণ এবং বিশ্বায়নের প্রক্রিয়ায় বাংলাদেশের কার্যকরী একীকরণের সাথে সম্পর্কিত বিষয়গুলির সমাধানের জন্য জাতীয় সক্ষমতা বৃদ্ধি করার চেষ্টা করে। বিশ্ব অর্থনীতির ওপর ভাল অভিজ্ঞান অর্জন করেছেন এমন বিশিষ্ট জ্ঞানী গুণীজনের দিয়ে বার্ষিক বক্তৃতারও আয়োজন করে সিপিডি প্রশংসাধন্য হয়েছে।

সিপিডি'র প্রকাশনাগুলো পুষ্টিকর প্রতীয়মান হয়েছে একটি জ্ঞানভিত্তিক বুদ্ধিবৃত্তিচর্চার দ্যোতক হিসেবে। সিপিডিতে নবীন ও মধ্যম পর্যায়ের গবেষণা কর্মীদের নিরন্তর প্রয়াস ও সৃজনশীল বিচার বিশ্লেষণের ধারাকে অতি তথ্য ও তত্ত্বানুগামী করার পরিবর্তে গণঅবহিত উপযোগী করার ক্ষেত্রে সিপিডি'র অবদান স্বীকার করতেই হবে। বিদেশী ডোনার ও বিশ্লেষকদের জন্য সিপিডি ইংরেজী ভাষায় বয়ান ও বিশ্লেষণ পত্র রচনার পাশাপাশি বাংলা ভাষায় উপস্থাপনে পারঙ্গমতা দেখাচ্ছে এটা সিপিডি'র গবেষণাকর্মীদের মধ্যে প্রেরণা এবং

বাংলাদেশের মিডিয়াকে সম্পৃক্তকরণে উৎসাহ জুগিয়েছে। সিপিডি'র ট্রাষ্টি বোর্ডে এর নেতৃত্বে সেই প্রথম থেকে প্রফেসর রহমান সোবহান এখনো শক্ত হাতে হাল ধরে আছেন। সিপিডি গঠনের পটভূমি চর্চায় দেখি ১৯৯১ এর তত্ত্বাবধায়ক সরকারের অর্থ ও পরিকল্পনা উপদেষ্টা হিসেবে অধ্যাপক রেহমান সোবহান আর্থ সামাজিক পরিস্থিতি ও গতিপ্রকৃতি পর্যালোচনার জন্য টাস্ক ফোর্স গঠন করেছিলেন—উদ্দেশ্য দীর্ঘদিন সামরিক শাসনাধীন থেকে উত্তরনে নতুন রাজনৈতিক সরকার কিভাবে কোন ধরনের কর্মপরিকল্পনা নিয়ে এগুবে তার একটা দিগদর্শন নির্মাণ করে দেয়া। মোট সতেরটি খাত বা বিভাগে এই টাস্ক ফোর্সে সুশীল সমাজের প্রাজ্ঞ কুশিলববৃন্দ, একাডেমিক এমন কি সরকারি বেসরকারি আমলা, পলিটিক্যাল পান্ডিটস, শিল্প উদ্যোক্তারা নতুন সরকারের জন্য প্রেসক্রিপশন রচনায় আমন্ত্রিত হয়েছিলেন। ইআরডির ফরেন এইড বাজেট এন্ড একাউন্টস অধিশাখার পরিচালক হিসেবে আমি নিজেও অতি নবীন সদস্য ছিলাম ‘এইড ইউটিলাইজেশন’ কমিটির। মনে আছে টাস্ক ফোর্সের প্রতিবেদন ইউপিএল চার খন্ডে প্রকাশও করেছিল। বাংলাদেশের প্রথম তত্ত্বাবধায়ক সরকার পরবর্তী নতুন সরকারের জন্য এই প্রেসক্রিপশন পত্রের মধ্যে ছিল অনবদ্য উৎসাহ উদ্দীপক উপাদান। চিন্তা ও কর্ম পরিকল্পনা প্রণয়নের খোরাক। আমার ধারণা অধ্যাপক সোবহান কিভাবে এই টাস্ক ফোর্সের ভূমিকাকে সরকারের বাইরে থেকে পালন করা যেতে পারে সে ভাবনার নিরীখেই ১৯৯৩ সালে গঠন করেন সিপিডি। সরকারের বৃদ্ধি ও জ্ঞানভিত্তিক উপায়-উপলদ্ধিকে শানিত করার কাজে সিপিডি সেই থেকে প্লাটফর্ম হিসেবে কাজ করেছে। সিপিডি'র দেখাদেখি পরবর্তীকালে বেশ কয়েকটি গবেষণা প্রতিষ্ঠান গড়ে উঠেছে। এক সময় এবং এমনকি এখনো বিআইডিএস সরকারের প্রচ্ছন্ন প্রযত্নে থেকে যে ভূমিকা পালন করে সম্পূর্ণ বেসরকারী পর্যায়ে সিপিডিসহ এসব চিন্তা চৌবাচ্চারা সমধর্মী ভূমিকা পালন করে চলেছেন।

বিদেশী ডোনার ও
বিশ্লেষকদের জন্য সিপিডি
ইংরেজী ভাষায় বয়ান
ও বিশ্লেষণ পত্র রচনার
পাশাপাশি বাংলা ভাষায়
উপস্থাপনে পারঙ্গমতা
দেখাচ্ছে এটা সিপিডি'র
গবেষণাকর্মীদের মধ্যে
প্রেরণা এবং বাংলাদেশের
মিডিয়াকে সম্পৃক্তকরণে
উৎসাহ জুগিয়েছে।
সিপিডি'র ট্রাষ্টি বোর্ডে এর
নেতৃত্বে সেই প্রথম থেকে
প্রফেসর রহমান সোবহান
এখনো শক্ত হাতে হাল
ধরে আছেন।

সিপিডি বিভিন্ন সংস্থা এবং প্রতিষ্ঠানের সাথে ফলপ্রসূ নেটওয়ার্ক করার ক্ষমতাকে তার মূল শক্তির উৎস ও প্রেরণার বিষয়বস্তু বিবেচনা করে। এখন পর্যন্ত, সিপিডি অক্সফাম ইন্টারন্যাশনাল, আইসিটিএসডি (জেনেভা), ওডিআই (লন্ডন), দ্য কমনওয়েলথ ফাউন্ডেশন, ওইসিডি, ইউনাইটেড নেশনস কনফারেন্স অন ট্রেড অ্যান্ড ডেভেলপমেন্ট এর মতো সংস্থাগুলির সহযোগিতায় বেশ কয়েকটি সংলাপ এবং গবেষণা অনুষ্ঠানের সূচনা ও আয়োজন করেছে। এর বাইরেও সিপিডি UNDESA, UNDP, UNESCAP, WTO, ILO, FAO, IRRI, ADB এবং World Bank এর সাথে কাজ করেছে।

সিপিডি ওয়ার্ল্ড ইকোনমিক ফোরামের একটি অংশীদার প্রতিষ্ঠান, যা ২০০১ সাল থেকে দাভোস ফোরাম নামে পরিচিত। এছাড়া সিপিডি সাউথ এশিয়া নেটওয়ার্ক অফ ইকোনমিক রিসার্চ ইনস্টিটিউটস (SANEI) এবং অন্যান্য বেশ কয়েকটি নেটওয়ার্কের সদস্যপদ ছাড়াও দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার প্রধান নাগরিক সমাজের থিঙ্ক-ট্যাঙ্কগুলির নিজেই একটি উদ্যোগ, দক্ষিণ এশিয়ার অর্থনৈতিক শীর্ষ চার সম্মেলনের একটি। ইউনিভার্সিটি অফ পেনসিলভেনিয়ার ২০১৪ সালে গ্লোবাল গো টু থিঙ্ক ট্যাঙ্ক সূচক রিপোর্ট অনুসারে, “দক্ষিণ-পূর্ব এশিয়ায় এবং প্রশান্ত মহাসাগরের শীর্ষ ৬০ টি থিঙ্ক ট্যাঙ্ক”-এর মধ্যে সিপিডি’র অবস্থান ৪৬।

যেহেতু সিপিডি প্রায়শ নিরপেক্ষ অবয়বে সরকারের ভাল সমালোচক প্লাটফর্ম হিসেবে দায়িত্ব পালন করে সেহেতু ভাল ফলাবর্তনের প্রতি এলার্জি আছে এমন সরকার সমূহ মাঝে মধ্যে সিপিডি’র প্রতি অস্বস্তি প্রকাশ করে। এর মধ্যে এন বি আর-এ সিপিডির মুখ্য প্রদায়কের করের ফাইল নিয়ে টানাটানির ঘটনাও আছে। সিপিডিপন্থীদের সরকারের আমলা মুৎসুদ্দিরা কখনো সখনো আড় চোখে দেখার অভিনয় করে থাকেন। তবে সিপিডি নির্ভয়ে তাদের গবেষণা ফলাফল তুলে ধরে চলেছে।

সম্রাট আকবরের নবরত্ন সভার একজন ছিলেন মোল্লা দোপিয়াজা (১৫২৭-১৬২০), যিনি বীরবলের বিপরীতে তার তীক্ষ্ণ ও তীর্যক বুদ্ধিদীপ্ততা দিয়ে সভাকে চমক দিতেন। সম্রাট আকবর একদিন তার কাছে জানতে চাইলেন দিল্লী শহরে এই মুহূর্তে কতগুলি কাক আছে? মোল্লাজী চট জলদী জবাব দিলেন ৯লাখ ৯৯ হাজার ৯৯৯ টি কাক আছে। শুনে দেখা যেতে পাওে, যদি এর বেশী হয় ধরে নিতে হবে অন্য শহরের কাকেরা এ সময় দিল্লীতে বেড়াতে এসেছে, আর যদি কম হয় বুঝতে হবে দিল্লীর কাকেরা অন্য শহরে বেড়াতে গিয়েছে। মহামতি আকবর এর পর জানতে চাইলেন, বলুন তো এই চৌবাচ্চায় কত কাপ পানি আছে? প্রত্নপল্লমতিভের মহান মোল্লা উত্তর দিলেন জাহাপনা কাপটি যদি চৌবাচ্চার সমান হয় তাহলে এক কাপ, যদি অর্ধেক হয় তাহলে দুই কাপ। সম্রাট আকবর মোল্লার এই জবাবের বেশ তারিফ করেছিলেন। চিন্তা চৌবাচ্চার চৌহদ্দি কত তা তার প্রতি সরকারি বেসরকারি নির্বিশেষে সকলের আগ্রহ আকাজ্খা ও অনুসরণ স্পৃহা যত বাড়বে তত এর উপযোগিতার পরিমাণ বাড়বে। অভিনন্দন সিপিডি কে। সিপিডি চিরজীবি হোক।

সফল হোক সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগের অগ্রযাত্রা

সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগ ৩০ বৎসর পূর্তি উপলক্ষ্যে প্রকাশিতব্য স্মরণিকায় আমাকে লেখা দেওয়ার সুযোগ দেওয়ার জন্য কৃতজ্ঞতা প্রকাশ করছি ও ধন্যবাদ জানাচ্ছি।

সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগ বাংলাদেশের অগ্রগতির লক্ষ্যে নীতি নির্ধারণের গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা পালন করে একটি প্রতিষ্ঠান হিসাবে জাতীয় আঞ্চলিক ও বৈশ্বিক পর্যায়ে স্বীকৃত। এই প্রতিষ্ঠানের প্রতিষ্ঠাতা জনাব রেহমান সোবহান-কে জানাতে চাই বিনম্র শ্রদ্ধা। ১৯৬০'র দশক থেকে তাঁকে আমরা দেখেছি বাংলাদেশ জনগণের মুক্তির আকাঙ্ক্ষাকে বাস্তবায়িত করার লক্ষ্যে তাত্ত্বিক ভিত্তি তৈরি করার জন্য তাঁর নিরলস কর্মপ্রচেষ্টা শ্রদ্ধার সঙ্গে স্মরণ করি। বাংলাদেশের স্বাধীনতা অর্জনের পর তার উদ্যোগে রচিত “টাস্ক ফোর্স রিপোর্ট” সদ্য স্বাধীন দেশে কর্মসূচি প্রণয়নে পথরেখা নির্মাণের নির্দেশক। আজও তিনি তাঁর সেই লক্ষ্যে অবিচল। সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগের (সিপিডি) মাধ্যমে বাংলাদেশের বিকাশ ও উন্নয়নের জন্য নীতি নির্ধারণে তাঁর প্রজ্ঞা ও অবদান বাংলাদেশে বিশেষ ক্ষেত্র প্রস্তুত করেছে। একই সঙ্গে প্রজ্ঞাবান নেতৃত্বের সঙ্গে যুক্ত মেধাবী অর্থনীতিবিদদের সমন্বয়ে পরিচালিত সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগ জাতীয়ক্ষেত্রে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ অবদানের দাবীদার।

সিপিডি সমতা, ন্যায্যতা ও সুশাসনের ভিত্তিতে অন্তর্ভুক্তিমূলক সমাজ গঠনের মধ্য দিয়ে বাংলাদেশকে অগ্রসর করার লক্ষ্যে কর্মসূচি গ্রহণ ও বাস্তবায়ন করে চলেছে। অর্থনৈতিক প্রবৃদ্ধির লক্ষ্যে যুগোপযোগী আর্থিক নীতি প্রণয়নে অংশীজনকে সম্পৃক্ত করার উদ্যোগ সিপিডি কর্মধারার অন্যতম কৌশল। শুধু অর্থনৈতিক প্রবৃদ্ধি নয়, জনশক্তির মেধা দক্ষতা বিকাশ, মানবিক উন্নয়ন সমাজের অগ্রগতির মৌলিক শর্ত। সেই শর্ত পূরণে সিপিডি'র রয়েছে বহুমুখী



ডা. ফওজিয়া মোসলেম
সভাপতি
বাংলাদেশ মহিলা পরিষদ

কর্মসূচি। গবেষণা, সংলাপ, প্রকাশনা, প্রচার, জাতীয় এবং আন্তর্জাতিক সংগঠনসমূহের সংযোগ সমন্বয় সিপিডি'র কর্মসূচির অন্যতম।

দেশের বিভিন্ন শ্রেণি পেশার প্রধিনিধিত্বশীল ব্যক্তিত্ব, নাগরিক ও স্বৈচ্ছাসেবী সমন্বয়ে সিপিডি গড়ে তুলেছে নাগরিক প্ল্যাটফর্ম। এই প্ল্যাটফর্মের মাধ্যমে জাতীয় গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ইস্যুতে নিরবচ্ছিন্নভাবে সিপিডি পরিচালিত কর্মসূচি দেশের তৃণমূল সহ সকল জনগোষ্ঠীকে চিন্তার ও অংশগ্রহণের সুযোগ করে দিয়েছে। একইভাবে ২০২২ সালে সিপিডি এসডিজি বাস্তবায়ন প্ল্যাটফর্মের মাধ্যমে এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নে সংকট ও উত্তরণে করণীয় সুনির্দিষ্ট দিকনির্দেশনা প্রণয়ন করেছে। ঈচউ'র সুপারিশসমূহ বিবেচনা ও আলাপ আলোচনার মধ্য দিয়ে বাংলাদেশের অগ্রগতির লক্ষ্যে বাস্তবমুখী পরিকল্পনা গ্রহণ ও কার্যক্রম পরিচালনা দেশের সার্বিক উন্নয়নে ভূমিকা রাখতে পারে।

এসডিজি'র কার্যক্রমের যে দিকটি বিশেষভাবে উল্লেখযোগ্য সেটি হল এই প্রতিষ্ঠানটির সকল কর্মকাণ্ড নারী সমাজসহ সকল প্রান্তিক জনগোষ্ঠীকে সম্পৃক্ত করার বিশেষ উদ্যোগ গ্রহণ করে যা কিনা এসডিজি অন্তর্ভুক্তিমূলক সমাজ গঠনের প্রত্যয়কে নিশ্চিত করে।

বাংলাদেশের নারী সংগঠন হিসাবে বাংলাদেশ মহিলা পরিষদ এসডিজির বিশাল কর্মকাণ্ড যুক্ত থাকার সুযোগ পাওয়ার জন্য আনন্দিত। আশা করি ভবিষ্যতেও নানা ভিন্নতার ভিত্তিতেও এসডিজি প্ল্যাটফর্মের ঐক্যবদ্ধ যাত্রা অব্যাহত থাকবে। আগামী দিনগুলিতে শক্তিশালী যৌক্তিক সকল এসডিজির যাত্রায় নারী আন্দোলন ও বর্তমান সময়ের মত সম্পৃক্ত থাকবে।

দেশের বিভিন্ন শ্রেণি পেশার প্রধিনিধিত্বশীল ব্যক্তিত্ব, নাগরিক ও স্বৈচ্ছাসেবী সমন্বয়ে সিপিডি গড়ে তুলেছে নাগরিক প্ল্যাটফর্ম। এই প্ল্যাটফর্মের মাধ্যমে জাতীয় গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ইস্যুতে নিরবচ্ছিন্নভাবে সিপিডি পরিচালিত কর্মসূচি দেশের তৃণমূল সহ সকল জনগোষ্ঠীকে চিন্তার ও অংশগ্রহণের সুযোগ করে দিয়েছে।

CPD at Thirty—A Personal Reflection

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) started its journey in 1993 as a private sector think tank for “in depth research and dialogue to promote inclusive policymaking in Bangladesh, and strengthen regional and global economic integration” with a vision to create an inclusive society based on equity, justice, fairness and good governance. During these years, the Centre has played a key role as an independent and credible research and advocacy institution to influence policymaking through high quality research, analytical capacity and unique knowledge of local circumstances. As a close observer of the unfolding of CPD’s activities, my strong conviction can be summarized as follows: the strong asset of CPD in identifying effective policy options is its tradition of basing recommendations on solid applied analysis in combination with social consensus across a wide range of stakeholders.

Further, as a social broker, CPD makes complex topics more accessible for the general public and helps stimulate national policy dialogue. Being a private entity outside the government, CPD provides independent monitoring of public policy, proposes policy alternatives, and its distinctive organizational structure has greater room for innovative thinking. Endowed with such advantages, CPD has occupied a unique position in the organizational structure for nurturing the development



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process in Bangladesh through helping to bridge the traditional gap between knowledge and practice.

Over the last 30 years, my occasional interactions with CPD as a researcher have deepened my conviction regarding the Centre's instrumental role in broadening local ownership of development strategies, in helping to rectify the 'knowledge imbalance' on development generated by solutions coming from the outside that are not tailored to local circumstances and particular characteristics of the country's political economy, and in promoting transparency and ownership by contributing to national debate through well-informed, alternative research and monitoring of government policies. As a matter of fact, CPD has become an integral part of the country's knowledge-producing system. It has successfully leapfrogged into postmodernity characterized by the age of complexity, information economy and knowledge society.

My own participation with CPD as a researcher has been enriched by varied experience that demands a wide array of skills. These involvements invariably combined integrated policy research along with ability to condense often complex research into succinct and accessible messages that can be communicated to the policymakers and the general public. Additionally, ability to work in a fast-paced environment, good interpersonal skills, ability to network well with a range of stakeholders from across businesses and policy makers, and clear enthusiasm and passion for the policy arena are added skills that I had to culture for effective participation.

Over these years, I feel proud when I realize that my involvement with CPD sometimes has contributed to how research and evidence shape government strategy and provide policy and advocacy groups with a clear evidence base for informed decision making. One of the

Over these years, I feel proud when I realize that my involvement with CPD sometimes has contributed to how research and evidence shape government strategy and provide policy and advocacy groups with a clear evidence base for informed decision making.

lessons coming out of my involvement with CPD is the realization that building relationships with policymakers is one of the most effective ways to shape policy and it can be both ad hoc and more structured. My involvement with CPD has made me to realize that because it is only by having a deeper understanding of the world as it really is—not as we may wish it to be—that we can develop better informed policies. This is why I believe think tanks like CPD are an essential part of Bangladesh's policy making process and the democratic polity.

I would like to congratulate CPD on its 30th anniversary for its contribution towards charting an inclusive development journey for Bangladesh. From the outset, CPD has been a truly inclusive voice of policy and dialogue in Bangladesh. This spirit is very much in the image of CPD's founder and the 'Guru' of Bangladesh's inclusive and equitable development paradigm—Professor Rehman Sobhan. Under his leadership and guidance, CPD has been conducting scholarly research, creating a space for debate, generating ideas, monitoring public policy, providing intellectual resources to the public and combining knowledge and policymaking to impact future policy processes in the country.

In fact, CPD has already created its wide space in society as an honest broker of policy knowledge, center of research and incubator of new ideas within thirty years which is not long enough in the life of a think tank. CPD channels knowledge between researchers, policymakers, and the civil society at large. Its research is about adapting multidisciplinary theories and empirics into insights and recommendations packaged to inform and meet the needs of policymakers and other stakeholders. As a social innovator, CPD has been expanding the policy perspectives and possibilities and providing information that is credible, relevant, and easily understood. It is catalyzing change by raising awareness on key socioeconomic issues, initiating discussion and showing policymakers a way forward. Above all, its expertise and leadership strengthens and mobilizes civil society.

Further, in envisioning economic reforms, CPD has applied powerful tools of institutional analysis towards analyzing the 'rules of the game' and the incentives that shape economic behavior to identify issues affecting long-term development, design alternatives, and develop

positive governance frameworks. In the process, CPD contributes towards uncovering the underlying causes of problems to recommend reforms that can work rather than treating policy symptoms. As the society and the economy in Bangladesh are becoming more complex with deeper penetration of globalization and structural transformation, institutions like CPD will have a greater role in bridging the gap between knowledge and policy in future and help in bringing knowledge and expertise to bear on the policymaking process of the country.

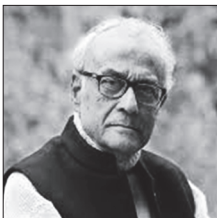
As the dominant think tank of the country, CPD provides policy alternatives as well as well-researched critiques of dominant policy ideas that create a space for the government to do its job better. As such, the credibility and independence of CPD is critical to its pursued role and one must admit that CPD has successfully maintained its high credibility and independence of action. And, in my view, this has been the major source of strength of CPD.

A Message

Celebrating Thirty Years of CPD's Journey

I was privileged to have interacted with the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh, from 2004-2007 as the India International Centre (IIC), Delhi, interlocutor in the IIC-CPD Indo-Bangladesh Dialogue, Prof Rehman Sobhan as my counterpart.

A Track II Dialogue, as ours was defined, seeks to represent the views of civil society as distinct from government views and policies and claims to represent the interests of the society as a whole, even if they may run counter to the stated policies of the governments of the day. It can seek to create confidence in the 'other' about the existence of different perspectives even on fraught issues such as river water sharing or trade and transit. The expression of frank views in an atmosphere of mutual understanding can create the structural framework on which further advances can be made. This can operate in another way as well. It is axiomatic among discussants of a particular issue that the views of the 'other' government are rigid and unreasonable. However, discussion with 'others' in civil society may establish that there could be reason behind the views of the 'other' government. And the dialogue needs must include stakeholders. I recall that while discussing the issue of transit facilities of Indian goods through Bangladesh, we came across objections from the union of Bangladesh truck owners. So, their representatives were called



Ambassador Deb Mukharji

Former High Commissioner for India to Bangladesh and co-convenor on behalf of the India International Centre of the Indo-Bangladesh dialogues with CPD

in for a patient hearing and patiently explained that they need have no cause for concern.

Track II dialogues are useful in themselves but cannot guarantee suitable reaction from governments concerned. We had sought to create direct links between civil society and government by having a couple of Track 1 ½ dialogue with the invited participation of senior government functionaries. This enabled the latter to get a firsthand glimpse of the thinking of civil society on particular issues.

Track II Dialogues flourish best in the barren desert of stilted interstate relations. When nations cannot or will not engage in productive exchanges for mutual benefit the mantle falls on civil society to show the way and remind the stakeholders of the opportunities that are slipping by. The seeds sowed by our final conclusions were able to sprout in more propitious times.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue has been a significant contributor to Bangladesh's march to development and self-reliance. The Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD) symbolizes its commitment to independence. On the 30th anniversary of its founding. I offer CPD my warmest congratulations for the road well travelled and good wishes for the years ahead.

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CPD—Some Reflections on its Remarkable 30-year Journey

At the outset, I should like to extend to the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), to its founder Chairperson Prof Rehman Sobhan and the team members, my warmest felicitations, and greetings on the 30th anniversary of its establishment. What a remarkable journey it has been! In the landscape of economic and social research and policymaking, CPD has emerged as a pivotal think tank that has fiercely dedicated itself to seeking knowledge, fighting injustices and to promoting inclusive and sustainable development. It has been carrying out its mission through a novel combination of intense research, evidence-based policy formulations, dialogues, and dissemination. What strikes me as unique in this campaign is not only the multifaceted focus on social inclusion outcomes, but also the inclusive processes, whereby it ensures the critical participation of policymakers, experts, global and national NGOs, businesses, labor, and other target groups. The CPD has developed a refreshing culture of dialogue and collaboration among key stakeholders. Thanks to its modes of dissemination through public platforms and media briefing, the CPD is a preeminent and indispensable player in the realm of policy research and advocacy.

The many special features and themes of the policy research work of the CPD range from macroeconomic and sectoral issues to regional and targeted programs. I have avidly followed the CPD's annual IRBD programs, and its regular flagship publications on the state of



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the economy, budget analysis and thematic reports that enlighten the stakeholders on the changing macroeconomic landscape and key policy imperatives. These have equally invoked professional and public interest and participation. Apart from this pivotal program, the CPD has worked on a myriad of economic and social issues and produced innumerable noteworthy publications and reference materials, which many of us have used extensively in our research. The spectrum of themes, and sub-themes, is vast. As a well-wisher, I wondered at times whether the CPD was spreading its resources thin. Another notable feature is the way the CPD tackles sudden and urgent issues, such as flood disasters, or the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic; it conducts such projects with admirable speed, depth and policy pertinence.

Across all its work, whether on macroeconomic or sectoral or on sustainability issues, I have admired its resolute focus and advocacy on curbing social injustices, especially, the alarmingly rising levels of inequality (including mooted the case for wealth tax) and for enhancing inclusive development. In particular, the CPD has been designing innovative interventions to uphold the needs and rights of women, and various disadvantaged and marginalized groups. As part of its “inclusion” paradigm, its research programs duly concentrate on multidimensional poverty, regional disaggregation, and specific vulnerable groups. I have closely followed the multiple dialogues it has held among relevant stakeholders to ensure decent wages of workers in the RMG sector. In collaboration with national and global institutions, the CPD is actively engaged in developing measures to fulfil the 2030 SDG agenda on “leave no one behind”. While the focus of these policy issues has been largely on Bangladesh, the CPD has been equally contributing to global discourses on development and has extensively participated in international fora to address challenges of social injustices, and to enhancing the causes of the Third World countries.

From a personal vantage point, I had a regular connectivity with CPD almost since its inception, initially through my ILO missions to discuss policy research on common themes on employment, labor, and development, and subsequently through participation in CPD’s experts group meetings, and as an adviser to a CPD program on labor and employment. I also had the opportunity and privilege to spend a few

weeks at the CPD, when I was invited to develop a book proposal, in collaboration with senior team members, on an inclusive growth strategy for Bangladesh, a core theme of its program. It focused on the contention that the critical metrics of inclusive growth are largely achievable through the pursuit of the goal of full employment (corresponding to UN's SDG8). This was also an opportunity for me to observe at close quarters the ground level functioning of the team, its immense dedication, and work ethics. It was refreshing to observe how every single project idea was mooted and transparently developed into a program and executed through collaborative research, but well-defined lines of specialization.

CPD has been designing innovative interventions to uphold the needs and rights of women, and various disadvantaged and marginalized groups. As part of its 'inclusion' paradigm, its research programs duly concentrate on multidimensional poverty, regional disaggregation, and specific vulnerable groups. I have closely followed the multiple dialogues it has held among relevant stakeholders to ensure decent wages of workers in the RMG sector.

On a broader perspective, one cannot fail to observe how meticulously the CPD upholds and pursues its values and principles that emanate from its motto ("generating knowledge, giving voice, challenging injustice"), and which strongly underpin the CPD's entire work. Such a pursuit, done with transparency, has enhanced its credibility and its forthrightness to speak truth to power. Without itself being dogmatic or overly ideological, the CPD has consistently challenged many orthodox, often widely practiced, positions such as the conventionally accepted use of GDP growth as the metric of development. It has equally challenged neoliberally inclined international lending agencies whenever it found their orthodox policy prescriptions, which came as loan conditionalities, were likely to do more harm than good. In fact, the CPD's extensive work on structural adjustments and stabilization policies, and subsequently on PRSPs not only supported the practitioners, but also broadened the research scope of rethinking the objectives of macroeconomic policy. At the ILO, in my work on structural adjustments and alternative macroeconomic policy, I found CPD's work extremely relevant.

As stated earlier, the CPD has pursued its values through a pragmatic stance, evidence-based propositions, and public dialogues. It has sought to underscore the critical role of distribution; it has engagingly embraced businesses as much as it has embraced labor. It has strongly advocated enhancing the role of public policies and interventions, and has carried out extensive work on wage policies, social protection, health, and education. However, as the CPD would itself reckon, as it has on several occasions, such policies, no matter how effective these are in correcting “market failures”, may not add up to ensuring a sustainably fair share of growth for disadvantaged groups, let alone reaching the goal of “leave no one behind”. This would necessarily warrant further research, public debates, and stakeholders’ collaboration—which the CPD is now eminently positioned to foster—on structural and institutional reforms. Like many other well-wishers, I shall continue to follow with utmost interest the CPD’s future programs towards the formidable campaign it has taken on to fight injustices, local or global.

CPD@30—Notes from a Friend

Introduction

It is a privilege to have been asked to write a few words on the thirtieth anniversary of the birth of the Centre for Policy Dialogue or CPD, as it has now come to be known. Looking back on its evolution, starting from an idea to a vibrant, thriving, and influential think tank, one cannot but be impressed by its achievements.

Let me first state that independent think tanks play a vital role in the life of an aspirational nation. If we just look around us, we cannot fail to notice all the different varieties of think tanks that surround us, jostling for space, for relevance, for perhaps an audience, or simply to declare that they exist. Truly independent think tanks, however, are hard to come by—especially in the Global South. Thus, many, or perhaps most tend to be directly or indirectly funded by the government—and thus expected to be subservient to government demands. Others tend to be donor-supported or dependent on donor-funded projects that must, therefore, have to operate around a donor-determined agenda. Independent public or private sector think tanks are rare, given the fact that almost all think tanks in Bangladesh depend on varying degrees of external funding.

Thus, for example, the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), which of course is Bangladesh's original think tank, is public



Dr K A S Murshid

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Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS)

sector funded but depends on some 40% of its revenue on donor-supported project funding. BIDS has the privilege of having a sizeable public endowment from which independent research can be funded. Given its governance structure as well as its financial stability, the institute could in fact consider itself largely ‘independent’. In practice, such independence often seems ephemeral.

Is CPD independent? My impression is CPD funding is diversified across core support from a few donors and project-based financing. The core support provides CPD with a degree of stability as well as flexibility which puts it in a position from where it can exercise a degree of autonomy. This is possibly rare in the non-public sector think tank community whose existence is determined by its ability to please donors, and whose existence, by its nature remains hand-to-mouth.

In other words, CPD has been able to negotiate the donor-finance space in a manner that allows it both stability and flexibility, and this is because of its leadership, its donor-relations, as well as its ability to nurture and effectively engage with its numerous stakeholders. In the process, CPD began with a high-profile leader in the person of Professor Rehman Sobhan, but quite deliberately nurtured a second-generation leadership—a rare institutional departure from the norm—that was to eventually assume the top institutional positions.

In other words, CPD successfully created its own space and today its research, studies, reports, and policy advice are highly valued by all those interested in Bangladesh affairs. It is also clear that despite a strong, sometimes critical stance on national policy, senior government officials and policymakers have continued to remain engaged with CPD scholars. Indeed, in my view, the ability of CPD to remain engaged has given it substantial convening power and an ability to carry out advocacy missions extremely well. In other words, CPD can get its messages through to its stakeholders.

The question is how did CPD do it? A thorough answer will require rigorous and detailed analysis for which I am inadequately equipped. My attempt here is merely to throw up some possible areas of enquiry that might be useful for those interested in undertaking such a task.

Objectives and Goals

I believe Professor Rehman Sobhan set out with the idea that it was important to have a structured 'policy' dialogue with policymakers that would serve to inform as well as encourage adoption of good, evidence-based policymaking. The basic assumption was that, there was a lot of research and analysis that was being conducted which provided useful policy insights. However, for various reasons, there was a large gap between researchers and policymakers which required that this space be breached, and important policy messages disseminated in a clear and timely manner. The mechanism that was devised for this purpose was the 'roundtable conference' which brought together key policy personalities and the political, NGO, and business leadership under one roof, thereby opening an important space for free and frank dialogue, and a platform that could help drive greater consensus amongst the ruling classes and the elite.

It is also clear that despite a strong, sometimes critical stance on national policy, senior government officials and policymakers have continued to remain engaged with CPD scholars. Indeed, in my view, the ability of CPD to remain engaged has given it substantial convening power and an ability to carry out advocacy missions extremely well.

The first question, therefore, is to what extent this model served its purpose? It did and it did not. I remember well the early 'dialogue' years that saw intense discussion in the roundtable meetings. I think dialogues were interesting in many ways and brought out to the open important views, stories, and policy positions. However, one thing soon became evident: dialogues seemed to have rather little impact on policy. For one, the assumption that there was a large body of analysis lying around that could simply be re-packaged and presented for 'dialogue', proved incorrect. High quality analytical research remained a constraint. In the absence of solid analytical backup, dialogue alone, proved insufficient to persuade policymakers.

The other aspect is the political economic reality faced, which is hardly impressed by economic analysis. Political economy has its own dynamics, and no amount of dialogue seemed to matter!

In other words, CPD gradually moved towards generating independent analytical products to address the first gap—a road on which it has remained steadfast. CPD research products focused on immediate, direct policy relevance including its main flagship publications like the State of the Economy reports.

As far as the second (political economy) gap is concerned—one has to adopt the view that think tanks can only keep harping on correct policy choices and expose options. Others would then have to translate those into policy.

The Leadership

While Professor Sobhan brought to bear the considerable weight of his personality and influence to launch CPD, he was aware of the need to build a second leadership tier that would eventually replace him—as already hinted—in a phased manner. That job has been admirably executed. He took under his wings and mentored young researchers like *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya* and *Professor Mustafizur Rahman*, who were to later assume key roles in the organization. Indeed, both have become high profile public intellectuals and household names in Bangladesh.

The other aspect of the leadership relates to the constitution and power of the CPD Board. Once again, we observe that the Board was allowed to play an effective role in the organization.

Research Staff

My understanding is—and I may well be wrong, CPD took a long time to build a critical minimum level of in-house research capacity. In the past, it had tended to outsource research to individual scholars, but this began to change. Currently, in-house capacity looks good but possibly this is something that still needs more focus.

The Media

For an institute that is focused on dialogue and advocacy, the ability to leverage the media was crucial. This is one job that CPD really excelled in, perhaps to a fault. To start with, Professor Rehman Sobhan was

already a media star. His every utterance would be picked up by an ever-willing media and translated into headlines. Subsequently, second tier stars emerged in the shape of *Dr Bhattacharya* and *Professor Mustafiz*. Thus, CPD always seemed to be in the limelight, sometimes to the chagrin of other scholars in other institutions. Indeed, the ‘CPD model’ began to attract others leading to copy-cat imitations that would soon run out of steam.

CPD’s media success however, forged ahead of its research capacity and at times, its messages appeared to lack substance. A far more basic problem was that scholars in other institutions, like BIDS, began to be tempted to focus more on media relations and building a media profile. The public recognition that it afforded was of course of value, indeed deemed to be of greater value than high quality research!

Concluding Remarks

The Centre for Policy Dialogue has achieved remarkable success over the last thirty years. It remains a vibrant, energetic think tank at the forefront of policy advocacy in Bangladesh as no other. To achieve greater heights, I believe it must deepen its research base, promote a third leadership tier which has now become important, and revisit and reimagine what its core responsibilities need to be in a rapidly changing context. A central constraint to independent policy research in Bangladesh is the lack of research endowments. CPD should lead the fight to persuade both the public and private sector to contribute to a research endowment fund that could wean us away from a donor-determined policy agenda to one that can truly reflect our own priorities and concerns.

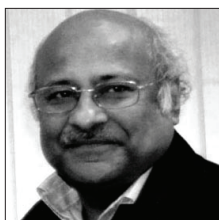
A final word: The pursuit of policy research is entirely worthy. However, the causal relationship between policy research and impact is too nonlinear, too complex to allow for easy attribution. This should not deter us—indeed it should further encourage us to explore ways in which policy research can be strengthened.

As the country continues to develop, the need for soft power will grow by leaps and bound. CPD is well-positioned to contribute to this new phase ahead of us.

Reflections on CPD's Achievements in the Last Three Decades

'The difference between the wisdom of Socrates and the lack thereof of the fool is that fools only know their own side of the question'; but then, 'He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that'. These remarks of John Stuart Mill could have been emblazoned in the logo of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). For the last thirty years, CPD has been engaged in a relentless mission to ensure that, in a variety of affairs of public interest in Bangladesh, people have an opportunity to see different sides of an argument through an open and informed dialogue.

To engage people in objective and dispassionate dialogues is not an easy task, however, because most of us tend to have deeply entrenched views, often held with such passion that reason becomes blind to the possibility that we could be wrong. The pervasiveness and uncompromising rigidity of this tendency led Nietzsche to fulminate in utter desperation: "the great majority of people does not consider it contemptible to believe this or that and live accordingly, without having first given themselves an account of the final and most certain reasons pro and con." CPD has given us an opportunity to salvage ourselves from Nietzsche's contempt by making it possible that if we continue to hold strong views on matters of public interest, at least we do so after examining the pros and cons of the arguments involved.



Dr S R Osmani

Professor, University of Ulster, UK and Visiting Professor,
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It is not just that CPD has created a forum for open dialogues, it has also endeavored to ensure that the dialogues are carried out in an ‘informed’ manner by first carrying out their own examination of the ‘pros and cons’ through serious research, which formed the basis of subsequent dialogues. This orientation of research—more towards enabling dialogues from multiple perspectives and less towards publication in scholarly journals—was a unique innovation of CPD in the research community of Bangladesh. This is not to undermine the quality of knowledge produced by CPD, but merely to emphasize the unique nature of its research.

The political authorities in power have sometimes tried to undermine CPD’s research by questioning their findings, especially when such findings seemed to reveal the government in an unfavorable light. More often than not, such questioning was merely in the nature of assertion, not founded on any reasoned counter-argument.

More importantly, however, whether CPD was right or wrong on any particular question is not in itself a matter of great significance, because the ground their research prepared for an informed dialogue remained valuable even if their own arguments were wrong. It is once again illuminating to quote Mill. Referring to the propensity of governments to stifle dissenting opinions, he wrote: “If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth produced by its collision with error.” Thus, even if CPD was wrong, it afforded an opportunity to others to gain a ‘clearer perception and livelier impression’ of what they believe to be the truth, which is almost ‘as great a benefit’ as ‘exchanging error for the truth’.

It is not just that CPD has created a forum for open dialogues, it has also endeavored to ensure that the dialogues are carried out in an ‘informed’ manner by first carrying out their own examination of the ‘pros and cons’ through serious research, which formed the basis of subsequent dialogues.

It is to be hoped that as CPD continues to pursue its mission in the coming decades, all stakeholders will

Prized Camaraderie with Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

take the opportunity created by the dialogues to sharpen their own understanding of the truth, both when CPD is right and when it is wrong.

As I sit and recall my engagements with CPD, it has been about two and half decades since I first made a presentation of a research on ‘World Trade Organization and Agriculture Trade’ in a policy dialogue organized by CPD on its own premises. It was splendid not only because of the way *Professor Rehman Sobhan* took forward the dialogue, but also because of the presence of a galaxy of sitting government secretaries, academia, representatives from the private sector, media, and civil society organizations. It was one of the exemplary jobs of CPD in influencing policy, generating research, and informing the public.

In the subsequent years, South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE), established with a vision of ensuring fair, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable growth and development in South Asia, has been working closely with CPD in research and advocacy on the issue of South Asian regional cooperation as well as issues of global, bilateral, and domestic concerns, despite the change of the guards in both organizations. We have conducted joint research and collaborated in advocacy in regional and global issues, including on the sidelines



Posh Raj Pandey, Ph.D

Chair Emeritus

South Asia Watch on Trade Economics and Environment
(SAWTEE), Kathmandu, Nepal

of WTO Ministerial Conferences. The partnership in organizing the South Asia Economic Summit (SAES)—a platform to discuss and debate issues perceived as critical to advancing the cause of deepening regional cooperation and integration in South Asia—has further deepened our partnership. The support extended to and the contribution made by CPD colleagues to our flagship publication, *Trade Insight*, is highly commendable. The frequent interactions, virtual as well as in-person, between researchers of both institutions is a testament of the strong professional bond between the two institutions.

It has been my privilege to witness the remarkable achievements of CPD, its unwavering commitment to public good, and a spirit of collaboration. We, at SAWTEE, commend the golden journey of thirty years of CPD in research and creation of new knowledge, rigor in public debate, contribution to the construction of social, political and economic consensus, and strengthening the capacity of the media.

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We wish every success of CPD in promoting inclusive policymaking and strengthening regional and global economic integration for creating a fair, just and sustainable global community and look forward to further deepening our institutional collaborations.

উন্নয়ন গবেষণার পথে পথে এবং প্রাসঙ্গিক ভাবনা

অভিনন্দন

একটি প্রতিষ্ঠান ৩০ বছর ধরে চলার অর্থই সাফল্য। কাজেই সিপিডি'র সাফল্যে অভিনন্দন। তাদের অর্জন বিষয়ে বর্ণনা বাহুল্য, কারণ এই প্রতিষ্ঠানের প্রকাশনা, আয়োজিত নীতি-সংলাপ ইত্যাদির লিখিত তালিকাটি সুদীর্ঘ ও প্রশংসনীয় এবং সবাই তা সহজে দেখে নিতে পারেন। সিপিডি বেসরকারি উদ্যোগে গবেষণা সংস্থা প্রতিষ্ঠার উদাহরণ তৈরী করে অন্যদের অনুপ্রাণিত করেছে। আমি নিজে BIDS এর রিসার্চ ডিরেক্টর হিসেবে ব্যস্ততার মধ্যেও চেষ্টা করেছি তাদের নানা আমন্ত্রণে সাড়া দিতে। আজকের লেখাতে তাই থাকছে শুরুতে কিছু টুকরো স্মৃতির উল্লেখ, তারপর উন্নয়ন গবেষণা বিষয়ে ভাসমান ভাবনার চয়ন।

নানা রঙের দিনগুলি

সিপিডি'র যেসব সংলাপে আমি শ্রোতা, প্রবন্ধ উপস্থাপক ও আলোচক হিসেবে ছিলাম তার তালিকা এত দীর্ঘ যে এখানে উল্লেখ করার সুযোগ নেই। (সেইসাথে অন্য অংশগ্রহণকারীদের পর্যবেক্ষণ করতাম, কেউ দেরিতে এসেও মঞ্চের যত কাছে বসা যায় সেজন্য কী আকুল, কেউ প্রশ্ন শুরু করে বক্তব্য রাখতে থাকলেও প্রশ্নবোধক চিহ্ন আর আসে না, ইত্যাদি)।

মাঝে মাঝে তাগিদ আসতো প্রতিষ্ঠানের চেয়ারম্যান অধ্যাপক সোবহানের ফোনে। একবার ডাকলেন, জাপানের এক অধ্যাপক একটি তাত্ত্বিক প্রবন্ধ পাঠ করবেন তার ওপরে আলোচনা করতে হবে। সেই তত্ত্বে একটু ফাঁক ছিল, সেটা ধরতে পেরে প্রচুর প্রশংসা পেয়েছি তাঁর নিজের ও অধ্যাপক নুরুল ইসলামের কাছ থেকে। কয়েক বছরের IRBD তে আমার প্রবন্ধ



রুশিদান ইসলাম রহমান, পিএইচডি
রিসার্চ ডিরেক্টর (অবসরপ্রাপ্ত), বি আই ডি এস
ও এক্সিকিউটিভ চেয়ারপারসন
সেন্টার ফর ডেভেলপমেন্ট এন্ড এমপ্লয়মেন্ট রিসার্চ

অন্তর্ভুক্ত হয়েছে। এমনকি একবার একটি সদ্য সমাপ্ত প্রবন্ধ পড়তে দিয়েছিলাম তাঁকে, পছন্দ হয়ে যাওয়াতে সেটি সেই বছরের IRBD তে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করা হয়েছিল, যদিও আগে থেকে সেরকম সমঝোতা ছিল না। অর্থাৎ সিপিডির সাথে গবেষণা বিষয়ে বাঁধাধরা চুক্তির বাইরে খোলামেলা সম্পর্ক ছিল আমার।

প্রতিষ্ঠানের কার্যক্রমের পর্যালোচনা করবার জন্য একসময়ে একটি কমিটি গঠন করা হয়। তার তিন সদস্যের মধ্যে আমি একজন। অন্য দুজন অনেক বয়োজ্যেষ্ঠ ছিলেন। আনন্দের সাথে সেই কাজে সময় ব্যয় করে রিপোর্ট প্রণয়ন করেছিলাম, তা পরবর্তীকালে সিপিডির কাজে লেগেছে।

নজরুলের একটি হাস্যরসাত্মক গানে আছে, ‘আমি ভোজনের তরে করি গো ভজন.....’। ডায়ালগ এর পরের পর্বেও তাই। সবচেয়ে আকর্ষণীয় দুটি দিন ছিল নৌযানে ভ্রমণ, শীতলক্ষ্যা আর মেঘনার বুকে ভেসে। সেসব দিনের কথা, সে কি ভোলা যায়! কত সাংস্কৃতিক অনুষ্ঠান-সন্ধ্যা, কত বিদগ্ধজনের সাক্ষাতে আলোকিত দিন, – সেসব পর্ব যেন চলতে থাকে নতুন উদ্যমে, তরুণ প্রজন্মের হাত ধরে।

নতুনতর অন্বেষণ

এখানে কিছু প্রসঙ্গ উল্লেখ করছি যা শুধু সিপিডির জন্য নয়, বরং তা নতুন পুরনো, সরকারি-বেসরকারি সব গবেষণা প্রতিষ্ঠানের সবার জন্য প্রাসঙ্গিক। তা থেকে গবেষণা-আলোচনার বিষয়বস্তু, ভাষা-আঙ্গিক, স্থান কাল নিয়ে পুনর্ভাবনা শুরু করার তাগিদ সৃষ্টি হতে পারে।

আজকাল গবেষণা-সেমিনার-আলোচনাতে সঙ্গতভাবেই অর্থনীতির কয়েকটি সামষ্টিক সূচক প্রাধান্য পাচ্ছে। শুধু সিপিডি নয়, আরো বেশ কয়েকটি প্রতিষ্ঠান এগুলো নিয়ে নিয়মিত পর্যালোচনা করছে। এগুলো স্বল্পমেয়াদে প্রধান সমস্যা হিসেবে গণমাধ্যমেও তাই ফলাও করে তুলে ধরা হচ্ছে, যদিও সমাধানের সুস্পষ্ট ও বাস্তবায়নযোগ্য দিক-নির্দেশনাগুলো নিয়ে আলোচনা কম।

সেইসাথে অন্য অংশগ্রহণকারীদের পর্যবেক্ষণ করতাম, কেউ দেরিতে এসেও মঞ্চের যত কাছে বসা যায় সেজন্য কী আকুল, কেউ প্রশ্ন শুরু করে বক্তব্য রাখতে থাকলেও প্রশ্নবোধক চিহ্ন আর আসে না, ইত্যাদি

স্বল্পমেয়াদের এসব সমস্যা দীর্ঘমেয়াদী কারণের মধ্যে প্রোথিত। তাই স্বল্পমেয়াদের সাথে মধ্যম ও দীর্ঘতর সময়ের পরিবর্তন বিশ্লেষণ দরকার, তার জন্য প্রয়োজনে নতুন তথ্য ও তত্ত্বের সমন্বয় করতে হবে।

উন্নয়নের নীতিমালা বিষয়ে সংলাপ বা গবেষণা শুধু অর্থনীতির সূচকের মধ্যে সীমিত না করে উন্নয়নকে বৃহত্তর জীবন ধারণার সাথে সম্পৃক্ত করে সেসব বিষয়ে গুরুত্ব দেবার দিন সমাগত, যাতে প্রত্যেকে যা হতে চায় বা করতে চায় সেই স্বাধীনতা পায় (এটা অমর্ত্য সেনের বক্তব্য থেকে নেয়া)। সেই স্বাধীনতা খর্ব হচ্ছে বৈষম্যের থাবায়। সামষ্টিক অর্থনীতির পর্যালোচনায় শুধু গড় সংখ্যা নিয়ে কারবার, তাই বৈষম্য বৃদ্ধির বার্তাগুলো রয়ে যায় অন্তরালে।

শিক্ষা ও জনমিতিক সূচকে বাংলাদেশ এগিয়ে গিয়েছিলো বিস্ময় জাগানিয়া কৌশলে। আবার কি তা থমকে যাচ্ছে? সেরকম ঘটলে তার দায়ভার গবেষকদের ওপরেও বর্তাবে, এই বিষয়গুলোকে অবহেলা করলে।

ক্ষমতায়ন, বিশেষত নারীর ক্ষমতায়ন বিষয়ে আলোচনা-বিতর্ক একসময় সম্মুখভাগে এসেছিল। কিন্তু কী কারণে তা আবার পেছনের সারিতে চলে গেলো তা বোধগম্য নয়। সম্ভবত তা সংবাদ শিরোনাম হওয়ার মত বিষয় নয়, সেই কারণে অনেক ছোট ছোট প্রতিষ্ঠান যারা এ বিষয়ে গবেষণা করত, তারা নীরব। বড় প্রতিষ্ঠান এবং বড় গবেষকরা এটাকে ছোট কাজ মনে করছে না তো ?

শিল্পখাত মনোযোগ পাচ্ছে, বিশেষত রপ্তানি শিল্প। কিন্তু কৃষি, ক্ষুদ্র উদ্যোক্তা, সেবা খাত ? এগুলো আজকাল কি আর স্মার্ট বিষয় নয় ?

সবচেয়ে ভয়াবহ ফল হতে পারে যে ভুলের, তা হচ্ছে পরিবেশ বিপর্যয়ের সম্ভাবনাকে ভুলে যাওয়া। পরিবেশ নিয়ে ভাসা ভাসা কথা হয়। হিসেব কষে কি দেখা হচ্ছে পরিবেশ বিনাশের ক্ষতি কতটা আর তার কারণ, তার জন্য কারা কতটা দায়ী ?

গবেষণা-আলোচনা-সেমিনার ঢাকা কেন্দ্রিক না হয়ে বিভিন্ন দিকে বিস্তৃত হলে, কিছু আঞ্চলিক শাখা থাকলে, সবার মধ্যে অংশগ্রহণমূলক অনুভূতি সৃষ্টি হতে পারে; রাজধানীর বাইরে উন্নয়ন পর্যবেক্ষণ সহজ হতে পারে।

গবেষণা ও সংলাপের ভাষা হোক বাংলা

বাংলা ভাষা দেশের সব স্তরের জনগণকে একসূত্রে বেঁধেছে। ভাষাই জুগিয়েছিল মুক্তিযুদ্ধে আত্মত্যাগের অনুপ্রেরণা। সেই ভাষার প্রসারের সর্বাঙ্গিক প্রচেষ্টা না করা হলে সেটা হবে আত্মঘাতী, বাংলা ভাষা তখন কোন্ঠাসা হয়ে পড়বে, উপার্জন কাজের বা স্মার্ট কাজের ভাষা না হয়ে শুধু যারা ইংরেজি বলতে বা লিখতে পারেনা তাদের ভাষা হিসেবে গণ্য হবে।

অর্থনীতি ও উন্নয়ন বিষয়ক গবেষণা ও সংলাপে প্রধান ভাষা বাংলা হতে বাধা কোথায়? বিশেষত বড় এবং প্রতিষ্ঠিত যে সব সংস্থা, তাদেরকে উদ্যোগী হতে হবে এক্ষেত্রে। এক সময় আলোচনা হয়েছে যে ইংরেজিতে রচিত গবেষণার ফল সহজ করে সবার বোধগম্যভাবে বাংলা

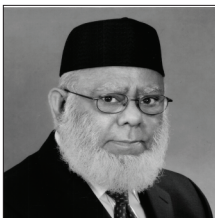
ভাষাতে লেখার উদ্যোগ নিতে হবে। এখন বরং দরকার গবেষণার মূল লেখা বাংলা ভাষাতে হওয়া, প্রয়োজনে ইংরেজি অনুবাদ করে দিতে হবে। তরুণ গবেষকদের একাজে অনুপ্রাণিত করতে হবে জ্যেষ্ঠদের পক্ষ থেকে। তরুণদের মধ্যে আকর্ষণীয়ভাবে বাংলা ভাষায় লিখতে পারার দক্ষতা যেন প্রশংসা ও স্বীকৃতি পায় সেটা দেখার দায়িত্ব নিতে হবে। বাংলায় লেখার কাজে প্রযুক্তির সহায়তা পাওয়া যাচ্ছে। আন্তর্জালে বাংলা অভিধান পাওয়া যাচ্ছে। আরো সমস্যা আছে, কিন্তু সেগুলো অতিক্রম করার জন্য আত্মবিশ্বাস নিয়ে দৃঢ়প্রতিজ্ঞভাবে অগ্রসর হতে হবে। সেখানে সরকারি বেসরকারি সব ধরনের প্রতিষ্ঠানের সহযোগীতা প্রয়োজন হবে। আমার পেশা-জীবন জুড়ে থাকা প্রতিষ্ঠান BIDS এখানে জোরালো ভূমিকা রাখতে পারে। সিপিডি কি এগিয়ে আসতে পারে এই ঘোষণা নিয়ে যে তাদের সংলাপ-গবেষণা-ওয়েবসাইটের ভাষা হবে বাংলা ! সেটা করলে বাংলা ভাষা প্রসারের ইতিহাসে তাদের নাম স্থায়ী হয়ে থাকবে।

An Overview of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) was established in 1993 by *Professor Rehman Sobhan* as a civil society initiative to promote an ongoing dialogue between the principal partners in the decision making and implementing process. Over the past 30 years, the Centre has emerged as a globally reputed independent think tank. As a Member of the Business Community, I had the opportunity to observe CPD's role very closely—sometimes as a speaker, sometimes as a stakeholder, sometimes as a participant and sometimes as an observer.

In the past, CPD has worked closely with the Ministry of Commerce and played a key role in the design of negotiating stance in the WTO, through research. CPD's past Executive Director *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya* was Bangladesh's Ambassador to the UN Office in Geneva including WTO and played a crucial role as a catalyst between Businesses and Govt. Agencies.

Think Tanks uphold up-to-date policies through evidence-based research, the exchange of views and ideas among multifarious stakeholders, and civil society in most of the countries of the world. Historically, the formation of the Clarkson's Committee in the US is regarded as the first think tank, which focused its efforts against the African Slave Trade in 1782. Now, in many countries of the world, especially in Bangladesh



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President

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Bangladesh
The World Business Organization

with different nomenclatures, these think tanks are playing a crucial role in different affairs of the state and the society. I like to mention here that CPD involves all important cross-sections of the society, including public representatives, government officials, business leaders, activists of grassroots organisations, academics, development partners and other relevant interest groups.

Since its inception, CPD has been a motivation of meticulous research, unwavering dialogue, and unwavering commitment to a comprehensive society. From its founding vision of equity, justice, and fairness, it has grown of insightful research, covering vital areas like Finance, Energy, Education, Climate Change, Gender Equality, and many more. Dissemination of information and knowledge on critical developmental issues continues to remain an important component of CPD's activities. With a view to influencing policies CPD deploys both research and dialogue which draw synergy from one another.

As we navigate through unprecedented challenges, the CPD's role becomes even more crucial. Its ability to analyze global trends, anticipate future challenges, and propose innovative solutions positions it as a thought leader in the policy landscape.

In a world increasingly interconnected, the Centre's work transcends borders, contributing to the global conversation on issues ranging from climate change to socio-economic inequality.

We know national vision is a prime component in development planning for any country across the world. In 2006, CPD had produced the Vision 2021 document through country-wide consultations and campaigned in favor of good governance. CPD is playing a very positive role in social policymaking through research, dialogues, programs, projects, and civic activism. It serves as an important benchmark for measuring the performance of a government and ensuring that it becomes accountable to the citizens.

As we navigate through unprecedented challenges, the CPD's role becomes even more crucial. Its ability to analyze global trends, anticipate future challenges, and propose innovative solutions positions it as a thought leader in the policy landscape. In a world increasingly interconnected, the Centre's work transcends borders,

contributing to the global conversation on issues ranging from climate change to socio-economic inequality.

The CPD's commitment to inclusivity is commendable, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered in the policymaking process. By facilitating open discussions and engaging with stakeholders from various sectors, the Centre ensures that policies are not only well-crafted but also reflective of the needs and aspirations of the broader population.

In a world fraught with complexity and division, CPD stands as a testament to the power of collaboration and shared purpose. It reminds us that progress is not a solo endeavor, but a symphony played by a multitude of instruments, each unique yet essential to the final composition.

This commitment to inclusivity extends beyond Bangladesh's borders. CPD actively champions regional and global economic integration. It is a bridge between nations, fostering cooperation and understanding in a world increasingly defined by interconnectedness. CPD's story is one of audacious dreams and persistent action. It is a space for vibrant dialogue where diverse voices collide, ideas clash and refine, and consensus takes shape. Through workshops, conferences, and open forums, CPD brings together policymakers, academics, business leaders, and everyday citizens to forge a better path for all of us.

As Bangladesh grapples with global challenges such as climate change, the CPD's work in advocating sustainable development practices has been instrumental. By highlighting the environmental implications of policies and proposing eco-friendly alternatives, the Centre has contributed to Bangladesh's efforts in mitigating the impact of climate change and building a resilient future.

In conclusion, the impact of the Centre for Policy Dialogue on Bangladesh is multifaceted and farreaching. It has not only shaped policies but has also instilled a culture of informed discourse and evidence-based decision making. As we acknowledge the achievements of the CPD, let us continue to support its endeavors, recognizing the vital role it plays in steering Bangladesh towards a prosperous and sustainable future.

CPD

A Tribute on its Founding Anniversary

In the civil society and policy discourse landscape of Bangladesh, Centre for Policy Dialogue—popularly referred to by its acronym CPD, justifiably looms large on account of its dedication to informed analysis and adherence to independent reasoning. Under the visionary leadership of Professor Rehman Sobhan and ably steered by a successor team, CPD has become a key go-to source for economic and social analysis and the preeminent vehicle for focused policy advocacy on sustainable development and social justice.

Stakeholders across the spectrum—government and non-government, national, local and international—are ready audiences for CPD’s knowledge products and policy messages. This is without question an enviable achievement for an independent civil society organization in a context such as that of Bangladesh.

Stakeholders across the spectrum—government and non-government, national, local and international—are ready audiences for CPD’s knowledge products and policy messages. This is without question an enviable achievement for an independent civil society organization in a context such as that of Bangladesh.

I have been honored to have known *Professor Rehman Sobhan* and many of his colleagues, in particular *Debapriya Bhattacharya*, *Mustafizur Rahman* and *Fahmida Khatun*, and participated in many CPD events



Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman

Executive Chairman

Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC)

over the course of the over quarter century of its existence. As a credible and influential civil society institution, CPD's continued and bold footprints is crucial and needed. Particularly so, as Bangladesh strives and struggles to keep its foundational dreams in focus. I wish CPD, Professor Sobhan and his colleagues many, many more achievements in the years ahead and look forward to continued collaboration.

CPD—A Pioneer of Independent Think Tanks in Bangladesh

One Friday morning in early September 1996, I received a phone call from Anis bhai (Mohammad Anisur Rahman), who was a senior to me at the Department of Economics, University of Dhaka. I had just completed my Master's exams (after losing one and a half years due to a session jam) and was awaiting the results. Anis bhai said, "Selim, *Professor Rehman Sobhan* wants me to find a good student from the Economics Department of Dhaka University for a research associate position at the CPD. Are you interested? If you are, come to the CPD office on Sunday at 11.00 AM".

It was a Sunday morning, September 8, 1996, when I arrived at the CPD's office in Eskaton Garden around 10.30 AM. I had been asked to wait for Professor Rehman Sobhan's call in the waiting room, where I sat alone, nervously anticipating the meeting with him. Soon, someone came to escort me to his room. It was not a big room but filled with books everywhere. He was sitting at his desk, which was also cluttered with books and papers. He looked up at me and said, "Ok, you are that good student that Anis told me! Take your seat." He smiled softly. I sat down on one of the chairs in front of his desk. He began to talk to me about my studies and future plans. After he was satisfied with my answers, he asked me to join CPD the next day. That was how I started my career at CPD in September 1996.



Dr Selim Raihan

Professor, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka
and Executive Director, SANEM

Between 1996 and 1999, at CPD, I worked on a research project evaluating the performance of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and privatized SOEs in Bangladesh, under the guidance of Professor Rehman Sobhan. I took a year's leave from CPD in 1997-98 to pursue my second Master's degree from the University of Manchester. The outcome of the privatization research project was published by the University Press Limited (UPL) as a book titled "Privatization in Bangladesh: An Agenda in Search of a Policy", edited by Professor Rehman Sobhan. I was honored to contribute two chapters to this volume. During those years, I also attended numerous policy dialogues organized by the CPD and chaired by *Professor Sobhan*, which addressed the pressing economic problems of the country. That was when CPD emerged as a leading think tank in Bangladesh.

The CPD's old office in Eskaton Garden consisted of three separate buildings within half a kilometer of each other. The main building, which housed *Professor Rehman Sobhan's* office (the Chairman of CPD), the administrative offices, and a conference room, was situated between the other two buildings. I shared an office with a few other young researchers in the first building. The third building was where *Professor Mustafizur Rahman* (then CPD's research director) and his two research associates, *Mohammad Anisur Rahman* and *Mohammad Abdur Razzaque*, had their offices. I have fond memories of many late afternoon "addas" with Anis bhai and *Razzaque* bhai.

Professor Rehman Sobhan was my first mentor in research. As soon as I joined CPD, he assigned me the task of serving as rapporteur for many dialogues. Being inexperienced in research, I struggled to follow some of the discussion issues in the dialogues and to summarize them accurately. He used to edit my draft rapporteur reports extensively with a pen. His editing style was my

Professor Rehman Sobhan used to edit my draft rapporteur reports extensively with a pen. His editing style was my first lesson in learning how to analyze and write better. He also asked me to prepare summaries of some important books. I cherish the memories of our close interactions while I was working on the draft chapters for his privatization volume.

first lesson in learning how to analyze and write better. He also asked me to prepare summaries of some important books. I cherish the memories of our close interactions while I was working on the draft chapters for his privatization volume. During those interactions, he asked for my opinion and never bothered about my age, and whatever naïve ideas I had. Those daily interactions with him came to an end when I became a lecturer at the Department of Economics, University of Dhaka in 1999 and eventually left the job at CPD. However, I later collaborated with him on a poverty project, where I wrote a background paper on education and poverty. Recently, I had the honor of writing a chapter on “Institutional challenges in Bangladesh’s economic transformation” for the book “Fifty Years of Bangladesh: Economy, Politics, Society and Culture”, edited by Professor Rounaq Jahan and Professor Rehman Sobhan, published by the Routledge. In 2011, I co-authored a book with Professor Mustafizur Rahman titled “Trade Liberalisation, Manufacturing Growth and Employment in Bangladesh”, published by the Academic Foundation. Since the establishment of SANEM in 2007, SANEM and CPD have collaborated through various national and regional forums.

CPD emerged in the early 1990s as a source of alternative perspectives in the discourse of Bangladesh’s development. The concept of an independent think tank is to conduct research and offer objective, evidence-based, and policy-relevant insights and recommendations to inform and influence the decision-makers and the public on various issues of public interest, such as economics, politics, social development, and international relations. CPD was a pioneer of independent think tanks in Bangladesh. Later, in 2007, when I was involved in the establishment of SANEM, I always tried to apply some of the valuable lessons I learnt from CPD to make SANEM an independent think tank as well.

As CPD celebrates its 30th anniversary, I feel privileged to be one of the few people who witnessed its early years. I will always treasure the unforgettable memories I have with CPD. I am grateful to CPD for guiding me on the right path in my research career.

CPD at the Forefront *30 Years of Dedication, Dialogue, and Development*

It is with immense admiration that I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) on their landmark 30th anniversary. This significant milestone is not just a testament to the years gone by, but more crucially, to the consistent excellence, dedication, and transformative influence that CPD has brought to the forefront of civil society.

Throughout the past three decades, CPD has not only given a powerful voice to civil society but has also played a pivotal role in promoting social accountability. Their unwavering commitment to fostering open dialogue, promoting transparency, and challenging the status quo has enriched our societal fabric and generated the demand for information and analysis on the emerging economic and social issues.

Moreover, CPD's success highlights the practicality and feasibility of a think tank operating effectively in a developing country like Bangladesh. Their consistent work serves as a good example for other think tanks and civil society groups, showing that focused expertise and dedicated efforts can lead to impactful outcomes.

One of the most commendable attributes of CPD is their adeptness in zeroing in on topical issues that resonate deeply with the masses. By strategically selecting thematic development areas, they have ensured



Dr Mohammad Abdur Razzaque

Economist & Chairman

Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID)

that their research and discourse remain both timely and pertinent. Their ability to distil complex economic landscapes into actionable insights and policy advice has been truly remarkable. Their practical recommendations and active involvement in policy discussions have made them a valuable contributor to action oriented development efforts.

CPD's ability to scan the global horizon and identify issues of common interest to many other countries with a similar socio-economic background is commendable. Their proactive approach in building partnerships with international organizations, civil society groups, and think tanks has been quite extraordinary.

As we reflect upon the illustrious journey of CPD, it is evident that their contributions extend far beyond the confines of research and dialogue. They have catalyzed the expectations of bringing socio-economic issues to the forefront of public discourse, demanding changes that yield improved outcomes. Even without the need to concur with everything, the core of their efforts revolves around empowering the public with valuable information and perspectives. And, of course, in the process, their research and analysis have become a primary resource for many when taking stock of the current economic situations.

Throughout the past three decades, CPD has not only given a powerful voice to civil society but has also played a pivotal role in promoting social accountability. Their unwavering commitment to fostering open dialogue, promoting transparency, and challenging the status quo has enriched our societal fabric and generated the demand for information and analysis on the emerging economic and social issues.

I wish CPD every success in the coming days. May the next chapters of their journey be marked by even greater achievements and deeper impacts. I am confident that with their continued zeal and dedication, the best is yet to come for CPD and, by extension, for many others who want their voices to be heard in public discourse.

Once again, congratulations on this monumental achievement, and here's to many more years of excellence and advocacy!

The Centre for Policy Dialogue *A Personal Journey*

June 11, 1994 in Dhaka remains a seminal date in my journey as a professional economist. I had joined the World Bank in Washington DC in early 1989, and had spent three exciting years as its Deputy Research Administrator, pioneering the World Bank's Annual Bank Conference on Development Economics (ABCDE) and a number of other research innovations under the leadership of World Bank Chief Economists Stanley Fischer and Lawrence Summers. Though the ABCDE had afforded me opportunities to engage with development researchers around the world, I still felt something was missing. That something was directly working on a developing country and engaging with country counterparts to help shape the Bank's analytical work and development assistance to that country. After all, that was at the core of the World Bank's work.

This yearning led to a move in mid-1992 to work as the World Bank Senior Economist for Bangladesh, already the largest recipient of concessional IDA assistance. The Bank in those years produced an annual Country Economic Memorandum (CEM) for key countries. I had visited Dhaka twice during 1992 to contribute substantive chapters on macro, the exchange rate, and the social sectors to the 1993 CEM. Now it was my turn to lead the team for the 1994 Bangladesh CEM. In my Bank staff evaluation for 1993, I had written of my hopes for this work, "I would like



Dr Shekhar Shah

Vice Chair of the Academic Advisory Council, Indian School of Public Policy, New Delhi
Nonresident Fellow, Center for Global Development, Washington DC

to contribute toward building and sustaining an effective client relationship with the Bangladesh Government and the concerned development community, one that is based on the intelligent dissemination of Bank policy advice and analysis, as well as a concern for client needs. In particular, I would like to use the format of the CEM to try to make a more persuasive case for Bank policy advice, one that is both substantive and engaging.”

And here I was in June 1994 at the Centre for Policy Dialogue doing just that: I was presenting the CEM that I had just completed, Bangladesh: From Stabilization to Growth. The Bank was discussing a CEM publicly for the first time, fulfilling the aspiration I had expressed for my first major work on Bangladesh. CPD itself was just a year old, and this was its third major policy dialogue. In commenting on the event, CPD had noted, “The present dialogue, held on June 11, 1994, was organized jointly with the World Bank whose Country Economic Memorandum (CEM) for Bangladesh for 1994 provided the background document for discussion under its new full disclosure policy to publicize its reports. Thus, it was the first occasion when the CEM was formally presented before a public audience for discussion. On earlier occasions the CEM was presented informally for discussion amongst professional audiences. This dialogue was the first public discussion of Bangladesh’s economic agenda for 1994-95 after the announcement of the national budget on 9th June. It provided an occasion for the Finance Minister to meet leading figures from the Opposition parties, including their advisers, in a professional discussion on economic policy. Annexure A provides the list of participants of the dialogue. The moderator of the dialogue was Professor Rehman Sobhan, Executive Chairman, Centre for Policy Dialogue.”

What was remarkable about these public discussions was CPD’s ability to bring to them the senior-most policymakers from both the ruling and Opposition parties, expert policy analysts and media commentators, and private sector, civil society, and donor representatives. The relationships developed through these CPD dialogues made my work on Bangladesh all the more rewarding.

And so began my long and lasting association with CPD, built on the strong foundation of that first 1994 event and followed by the many discussions at CPD during 1994-2000 when I had the great privilege of discussing my work publicly, usually led by Dr Sobhan's critical but always gracious role as moderator, followed towards the end of this period by the immensely rewarding relationship that I was fortunate to have with his successor, Professor Debapriya Bhattacharya. It also helped that I had known Dr Sobhan from my earlier work during 1984-89 with the Ford Foundation in funding CSCD, the Committee for Studies on Cooperation in Development in South Asia, on whose Board Rehman had served.

What was remarkable about these public discussions was CPD's ability to bring to them the senior-most policymakers from both the ruling and Opposition parties, expert policy analysts and media commentators, and private sector, civil society, and donor representatives. The relationships developed through these CPD dialogues made my work on Bangladesh all the more rewarding: a good example was the extreme speed with which I was able to put together the Bank's 1998 Emergency Flood Recovery Project. The richness of these discussions was a constant lesson to me in how professional policy dialogues should take place, and to this day serves me well in all manners of my professional work.

Though I kept in touch in the years that followed with Debapriya and then with Professor Mustafizur Rahman, his eminent successor, our association grew stronger in the years after I left the World Bank in 2011 to head the National Council of Applied Economic Research in New Delhi as its Director General. There were already the previous bonds to build on, in addition to events such as the South Asia Economic Summits (SAES) that our mutual friend Saman Kelegama at the Institute for Policy Studies in Colombo had pioneered in 2008, including the 4th SAES hosted by CPD in Dhaka in 2011. But now, in addition, both CPD and NCAER were also part of the global Think Tank Initiative (TTI).

The tremendous community spirit that this led to was fully on display in the regional TTI workshops held during 2011-2019, and it was natural for CPD and NCAER to often combine forces. A poignant reminder of spirit was the thoughtful and wide-ranging video interview that I did with

Mustafiz in March 2013 at the TTI meeting in Marawila. And it was on display at the last TTI regional meeting in 2018 in Savar that CPD hosted. Thanks to CPD, I was privileged to moderate the opening session, and be a panelist with Dr Fahmida Khatun, by then CPD's capable Executive Director, in the closing session on the future of the South Asian TTI network. These events with CPD stand out for me as some of the most satisfying moments in the 10-year history of the Think Tank Initiative.

But there was more. During these TTI years, CPD also increasingly began to play a role as the voice of the Global South, a think Tank with local roots and global reach. Led by Debapriya as a natural follow-up to his role as Bangladesh's Ambassador and Permanent Representative in Geneva, CPD pioneered two global initiatives, the LDC IV Monitor and the seminal work on establishing Southern Voice. This led to my joining CPD in several activities, whether in Dhaka in 2013 to set the agenda for Southern Voice, or joint CPD-NCAER sessions in New Delhi and Mexico City in 2014 on deconstructing South-South cooperation, or, jumping almost a decade, most recently in Bangkok in early 2023 on the post-pandemic choices facing the Global South.

What has been remarkable for me in this professional journey alongside CPD is to see how consistently the institution has held to the values and vision that led *Professor Rehman Sobhan* to set up CPD 30 years back. If one were to pick the one voice outside government that has had the most impact on policy thinking and making in Bangladesh, I believe it has to be CPD's. As a voice of reason and evidence in often fraught political and economic situations, CPD stands out today in Bangladesh, in South Asia, and in the Global South.

My heartfelt congratulations to everyone at CPD who has played a role in this tremendous journey.

Annexure A: Dialogue Participants

Session I

Macroeconomy

Mr. Saifur Rahman

Hon'ble Finance Minister,
Government of Bangladesh

Mr. M. Morshed Khan

Special Advisor to the Prime
Minister

Mr. Tofail Ahmed

Member of Parliament

Mr. Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury

Member of Parliament

Mr. Amir Khasru Mahmud

Member of Parliament

Mr. S.A.M.S. Kibria

Member, Awami League, Advisory
Council

Mr. A.M.A. Muhith

Former Finance Minister,
Government of Bangladesh &
Convenor, Gono Forum

Mr. Nasimuddin Ahmed

Finance Secretary, Government of
Bangladesh

Professor M. Yunus

Managing Director, Grameen Bank

Mr. Lutfulhil Majid

Secretary, ERD, Government of
Bangladesh

Dr. M. K. Alamgir

Chairman, Tariff Commission

Mr. S.B. Chowdhury

Ex-Governor, Bangladesh Bank

Dr. Tawfiq-E-Elahi

Secretary, Statistics, Government of
Bangladesh

Mr. Mahbubur Rahman

President, FBCCI, Sector Reform
Project

Mr. Latifur Rahman

President, MCCI

Professor Nurul Islam

Senior Advisor, IFPRI and Former
Deputy Chairman, Planning
Commission

Dr. Mashiur Rahman

Secretary, Railways Division,
Government of Bangladesh

Abu Abdullah

Bangladesh Institute of
Development Studies (BIDS)

Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud

Department of Economics, Dhaka
University

Professor Abdul Bayes

Department of Economics,
Jahangirnagar University

Mr. S.H. Kabir
Former President, MCCI and
Former President, BEA

Mr. Christopher Willoughby
World Bank

Mr. Shekhar Shah
World Bank

Mr. Hafiz Ghanem
World Bank

Professor Rehman Sobhan
Chairman, Centre for Policy
Dialogue (CPD)

Dr. SM. Hashemi
Department of Economics,
Jahangirnagar of University

Session II **Financial Sector**

Mr. Saifur Rahman
Hon'ble Finance Minister,
Government of Bangladesh

Mr. Moudud Ahmed
Member of Parliament

Mr. Abul Hasan Chowdhury
Member of Parliament

Mr. Patrick Vath
Manager, FSRP

Mr. S.Z. Khan
Chairman, Security and Exchange
Commission (SEC)

Mr. S.A.M.S. Kibria
Member, Awami League Advisory
Council

Mr. A.M.A Muhith
Former Finance Minister and
Convenor, Gono Forum

Mr. Nasimuddin Ahmed
Finance Secretary, Government of
Bangladesh

Mr. Shah Abdul Hannan
Deputy Governor, Bangladesh Bank

Mr. Mustafa Aminur Rashid
Managing Director, Agrani Bank

Mr. Sohail Rahman
Chairman, BEXIMCO

Mr. Khaled Shams
Deputy Managing Director,
Grameen Bank

Mr. Kazi Abdul Majid
Managing Director, National Bank

Mr. Owaise Saadat
World Bank

Professor Nurul Islam
Senior Advisor, IFPRI and Former
Deputy Chairman, Planning
Commission

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Mr. S.H.Kabir
Former President, MCCI and
Former President BEA.

Mr. Christopher Willoughby
World Bank

Mr. Shekhar Shah
World Bank

Mr. Hafiz Ghanem
World Bank

Professor Rehman Sobhan
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Policy Dialogue (CPD)

Dr. S.M. Hashemi
Department of Economics,
Jahangirnagar University

Dr. Mustafizur Rahman
Faculty of Business Studies, Dhaka
University, Fellow, CPD.

Session III

Private Sector Development

Mr. Shamsul Islam
Commerce Minister, Government
of Bangladesh

Dr. Moyeen Khan
Hon'ble State Minister for Planning

Mr. Rashed Khan Menon
Workers Party

Mr. Mesbahuddin Khan
Member of Parliament

Captain (Rtd.) Hameedullah
Member of Parliament

Mr. Jamaluddin Ahmed
Former Deputy Prime Minister

Mr. A. S. H. K. Sadeque
Member, Awami League Advisory
Council

Mr. Kamaluddin Chowdhury
Chairman, Privatisation Board

Mr. M. Moniruzzaman
Ex-Secretary, ERD, Government of
Bangladesh

Mr. Mofazzal Karim
Secretary, Commerce Government
of Bangladesh

Dr. S.M. Farid
Secretary, Labour, Government of
Bangladesh

Dr. Akbar Ali Khan
Chairman, NBR, Government of
Bangladesh

Mr. Manzoor Elahi
President, BEA

Mr. Nurul Islam
President, Trade Union Council,
(TUC)

Mr. Owise Saadat
World Bank

Professor Nurul Islam
Senior Advisor, IFPRI and Former
Deputy Chairman, Planning
Commission

Dr. Mashiur Rahman
Secretary, Railways, Government of
Bangladesh

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Mr. S.H. Kabir
Former President (MCCI)

Mr. Christopher Willoughby
World Bank

Mr. Shekhar Shah
World Bank

Mr. Hafiz Ghanem
World Bank

Professor Rehman Sobhan
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

Dr. S.M. Hashemi
Department of Economics,
Jahangirnagar University

Some Reflections on CPD at Thirty

I consider it a great privilege and honor to have been invited to write a few words on CPD while celebrating 30 years of its establishment this year. If I remember correctly, CPD was established with two major objectives in mind. First, to conduct policy dialogues on burning socio-economics issues of Bangladesh, inviting experts from different spheres of life. The dialogue was triggered off with a keynote paper prepared and presented by one of the research staff of CPD, especially in later years. During the initial years, Professor Rehman Sobhan, the founder Executive Chairman of CPD kicked off the dialogue with his opening remarks which also set the tone of the dialogue.

Secondly, to prepare an Independent Review of Bangladesh Economy (IRBD) in order to critically review both the macroeconomic and sectoral performance of the economy. The review was both diagnostic and prescriptive in nature, in the sense that IRBD not only reviewed the actual performance of the outgoing fiscal year, but made concrete recommendations how to improve its performance in the coming fiscal also. This was a strategic and timely initiative since the two review documents prepared by each year reflected either the views of the donor community (Country Memorandum prepared by the World Bank) or those of the GoB (prepared by the Ministry of Finance along with its budget document, The Bangladesh Economic Review).

It may be emphasized here that during the initial years when the in-house capacity was not adequate, CPD had to engage experts from other research



Dr Quazi Shahabuddin

Former Director General

Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS)

and/or teaching organization such as BIDS and Dhaka University. I had the privilege to contribute to the preparation of IRBD, along with a few others, to deal with agricultural issues. This practice continued for a number of years till CPD developed its in-house capacity to prepare the document itself. Even then, CPD had the modesty to invite experts (both macroeconomic and sectoral) to provide comments and suggestions on the draft review document prepared by itself. Again, I had the privilege to participate in these discussion sessions.

CPD has come a long way since its establishment in 1993. It is now widely recognized as the leading private think tank in the country. What is more significant, in order to sustain its progress and development, the mantle of leadership has been passed on to the younger generations over the last three decades. This points to the sagacity and farsightedness of the CPD leadership, especially its founding father, *Professor Rehman Sobhan* ably assisted by *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya*, *Professor Mustafizur Rahman* and *Dr Fahmida Khatun*.

The activities of CPD, as we all know, are supervised and guided by a Board of Trustees (BOT) consisting of distinguished persons of the Civil Society in Bangladesh. The BOT not only monitor the progress of various activities of CPD but points out how things could have been done better, apart from suggesting new areas of its activities.

May I take this opportunity to mention that CPD leadership should seriously consider of bringing out a quarterly journal in English and an annual journal in Bengali for wider dissemination of its research outputs, which are now published as research papers and/or monographs. Having edited the quarterly journal of BIDS (The BDS) for about a decade, I am fully aware that this is easier said than done, especially on a regular basis. But CPD could nevertheless give it a try. I strongly feel that it is worth the efforts put in, burning in the process some midnight oil.

In another 20 years, CPD will have completed 50 years of its establishment, and will celebrate its Golden Jubilee. It is a demographic certainly that I would not be around to participate in its celebration, which must be done in a grand fashion, much in line with what BIDS did in 2007 when I was the DG of the Institute. But this should not prevent me from wishing CPD Godspeed in whatever activities it gets involved in, in the coming years including the Golden Jubilee celebration in 2043!

30 Years of CPD *Some Prismatic Reflections from Pakistan*

When I look back on the history of Centre for Policy Development (CPD) Bangladesh, I find it as close to my heart as Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI). Both CPD and SDPI come to me as twins born on different lands. SDPI was established in 1992 and CPD came into being a year later with the same objectives, goals, mission, and vision of carrying forward the broader agenda of sustainable development. Both the South Asian think tanks are committed to generating knowledge, bridging the gap between evidenced-based research and policy advocacy, and serving humanity by assisting the policymaking institutions on issues of sustainable development. The objective behind this 30-year long struggle is to pave the way for an inclusive society within their respective lands and foster peace and cooperation across the region.

Since their formation, the two institutes are struggling to scale up their synergies in showcasing empirical research on a wider range of issues, including economy, climate change, livelihood, food security, energy, disaster management, poverty alleviation, conflict resolution, gender justice, industrial or agricultural growth, etc. Whether it is the public policy analysis or the safety measures in the times of COVID-19, both the institutes proved themselves credible and relevant.



Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri

Executive Director

Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)

CPD's assessment of stimulus and relief package in times of the COVID-19 in order to mitigate the pandemic impact was also very unique. How CPD quickly adopted the new normal, shifting to modes of working from home and interacting through digital platforms is strong evidence of its being a research think tank, which is like any of the global entity, stayed relevant and fought its way through the deadly disasters.

Among hundreds of similarities what makes me delighted and enlightened is that both the civil society initiatives have now achieved the level of credible think tanks of Asia and beyond. They are self-sustained and compatible; at the same time, they are resilient to any of the ideological, technological, and financial challenges.

While skimming through CPD's publications, including research papers, policy briefs, Op-Eds, I always stumble across a lot of thought-provoking concepts and narrative building material, especially the new research patterns and methodologies used in modern technological writings besides the outcome of these papers in the form of policy recommendations or the way forward.

Similarly, the conferences, dialogues, and youth seminar series are the meticulous efforts of CPD researchers, advocacy influencers and press managers for which they deserve a big applaud. Every initiative and research work led by the CPD board and senior management seems unique to me as it is inspiring, thought-provoking, well-conceived and well-synthesized. I believe it has a deep-rooted impact on public affairs. Especially, the CPD's flagship programme—the yearly Interim review of Bangladeshi economy—assessing the country's macroeconomic performance is a wrought piece of work and a great service to the country's economic fundamentals. It not only delineates a true and empirical

CPD's research work on banking, power and energy, trade and business especially the SMEs, employment generation, social problems, and SDGs had contributed a lot in the country's smooth graduation towards a merging economy on the world horizon.

picture of the economy but also provides guidance on how to overcome the economic and growth challenges.

Bangladesh Economy in FY2020-21: Interim Review of Macroeconomic Performance is a well-researched document that provides a way forward for sustainable and resilient development. I must say it may guarantee an inclusive society and overall empowerment and a window for breeze to please the unemployed youth. The suggestions and solutions of the issues highlighted in this document, such as food prices volatility, monetary policy, challenges to agriculture and industrial sector, need for renewable energy, impact of the pandemic on economy especially the large and small businesses and trade, are very impressive and implementable in today's changing geopolitical scenario especially in the backdrop of increasing oil prices and Russia-Ukraine conflict.

CPD's research work on banking, power and energy, trade and business especially the SMEs, employment generation, social problems, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) had contributed a lot in the country's smooth graduation towards a merging economy on the world horizon.

I must say that all these issues are even more relevant in the context of Pakistan. Beyond this I may suggest that the researchers from Pakistan and Bangladesh should sit together and coin a joint strategy to resolve their economic woes, as challenges on both sides are almost the same. It can pave the way for a graceful intellectual integration and overlapping of the two cultures. Let me quote a Chinese saying: 'No matter how tall the mountain is, it cannot block the sun.'

Critical Policy Dialogue is Essential for More Sustainable Development

It has been an honor and privilege to have been associated with the Centre for Policy Dialogue in Dhaka from the outset. I first participated in a CPD event when I was invited by *Professor Rehman* to speak at the Inaugural session of an international dialogue on 'Learning from East Asia: Lessons for South Asia', in Dhaka in July 1996. My presentation was followed by speeches by the then Finance Minister of Bangladesh, *Shah A M S Kibria* and the *Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina*. I was again invited to participate in a CPD event in the mid-1990s with *Dr Mary Shirley*, chief author of the World Bank's *Bureaucrats in Business*, published under the auspices of the government of Japan at the height of the Endaka. Cognizant of *Professor Rehman Sobhan's* seminal work on Bangladeshi public enterprises and the damage done by privatization in Malaysia and other countries including the Soviet Union, I was not sure of what to expect in Dhaka at the peak of the Washington Consensus's influence, especially in the global South. After a robust debate, *Dr Shirley* told me that she did not really disagree with my remarks critical of privatization, but emphasized I was irresponsible for urging Bangladeshis to try to improve the management of their state-owned enterprises instead of privatizing them.

In the following year, I joined a number of other development economists to reconsider the East Asian miracle. I was happy to see



Dr Jomo Kwame Sundaram (KS Jomo)

Visiting Senior Fellow, Khazanah Research Institute, Visiting Fellow, Initiative for Policy Dialogue, Columbia University and Adjunct Professor, International Islamic University, Malaysia

Professor Nurul Islam again, whom I had first met in the early 1970s while an undergraduate at Yale and he was a refugee economist director of the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics. I also appreciated the independent thinking of Justin Lin Yifu from China, whom I met at the CPD conference in 1996. He shared my view on the overstated role of property rights in boosting productivity. I remember differentiating between Northeast and Southeast Asia, and emphasizing the importance of enabling the emergence of indigenous industrial enterprises, capacities and capabilities.

I have, over the years, participated in many of CPD's dialogues at the national, regional and global level. In September 2018, I was honored to deliver the third CPD Anniversary lecture on Development Goals for Bangladesh. I emphasized the need to think of addressing malnutrition in connection with achieving food security, the growing viability and affordability of certain types of renewable energy, and problems posed by economic inequality between and among countries.

In retrospect, I soon regretted not discussing the challenges Bangladesh would face as it 'graduated' from being a least developed country (LDC). I have been especially concerned that Bangladesh builds on its achievements, made possible by pragmatically using the opportunities of its status as an LDC, especially to develop its generic pharmaceutical industry.

Contributing to Bangladesh's graduation is no mean feat. I hope CPD will continue to provide a platform for continued critical, but pragmatic dialogue to sustain sustainable development in these challenging times.

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A Message

Celebrating Thirty Years of CPD's Journey

I was invited by Professor Rehman Sobhan to join the Board of Trustees of CPD in 1994 and have remained on the Board ever since, sharing its long journey as a premier civil society organisation over these 30 years. I have been privileged to witness, from up close, CPD's growth from pioneering the dialogue process, bringing together state and civil society, to its present position as a nationally and globally recognised think tank.

I have known its founder *Professor Rehman Sobhan* since the 1960s but we came closer together when he was a member of the Planning Commission and I was Planning Secretary in 1993-94.

In the years after leaving the government, *Rehman* served as the Director General of BIDS and later founded CPD. Through his ceaseless writings, lectures, and actions, he emerged as the 'quintessential political economist,' in the words of *Amartya Sen*.

His writings on the economic, social, and political issues, bring out, again and again, only one theme—that of equity and justice, for which he has been fighting since 1961. It looks like his initial vision has come back a "Full Circle", and he is still fighting as a young man.



M. Syeduzzaman

Former Finance Minister

Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh Planning Commission

Member, CPD Board of Trustees

Rehman's concerns in the most recent years—malfunctioning of the democratic process, malgovernance, deficiencies in politics, losing control on the development agenda through extension of time and cost, and lack of adequate supervision have been projected in CPDs mission across these 30 years.

In the years that followed, when we worked together in the Planning Commission, or the Board of BIDS or the Board of the CPD, or Civil Society movements, my impression of Rehman changed from that of a visionary, to a super CEO.

It is evident from the ways he gave leadership to his team in the Planning Commission, BIDS, and the CPD as an internationally reputed institution, the way he managed the work of 29 Task Forces (in 1990-91) in less than 3 months, and the way he has established the CPD as a Centre of excellence, civil society think tank, with recognition in the region and beyond.

Rehman relinquished his leadership of CPD to a younger generation by inviting *Debapriya Bhattacharya* to take over as Executive Director, CPD in 1996. Deb was succeeded by *Mustafizur Rahman* and *Mustafiz* by *Fahmida Khatun*. This younger generation have provided excellent leadership to CPD and enabled its growth into the leading position it commands today.

Congratulations to Rehman Sobhan and congratulations to CPD for completing 30 years of his journey.

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A Message

Celebrating Thirty Years of CPD's Journey

It is a great honor and privilege as part of these CPD commemorative 30th anniversary activities to share some memories and reflections on my experience of being part of CPD's "journey" in recent years.

Having worked as a researcher with many partners in South and South-East Asia for more than 30 years, my initial direct connection with CPD came about through the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) in 2009. TTI was dedicated to strengthening the capacity of independent policy research institutions in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Launched in 2008 and managed by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), TTI was a partnership program with several other funding agencies including the Hewlett and Gates Foundations, and the UK, Norwegian and Dutch governments.

I joined IDRC, and TTI, directly from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in the UK where I had been Director of Graduate Studies, and leader of the Participation, Power and Social Change research team. IDS already had collaborative relationships with CPD which were highly appreciated. On coming to IDRC as a Senior Program Specialist, my role in TTI was to interact directly with the research institutions which the program supported, engaging with them around their organizational learning and development goals and needs, as well as leading TTI's



Dr Peter Taylor

Director of Research

Institute of Development Studies (IDS)

evaluative approach. This built on my own personal research interests in organizational learning and participation, and I was keen to understand more about the community of researchers undertaking important work in a diverse range of contexts.

I entered TTI at an exciting moment, as the program was in full swing with selection of the policy research institutions that would receive long-term, flexible financial and technical support. There was fierce competition, with many research institutions showing great interest in what the program could offer. After several months of application reviews, visits, discussions and a set of challenging decisions to make about where support could be provided, the final list was agreed upon. CPD joined TTI as one of only two research institutions in Bangladesh to receive support.

The selection of CPD for support from TTI was not at all surprising, due to their reputation for undertaking credible and relevant research on an array of economic and social issues in the very dynamic context of Bangladesh. A key point of TTI support was that the organisations selected as members of the program should have a strong track record of work, and a vision for a path towards sustainability which would enable their work to have the greatest possible impact, on policy, practice, and ultimately helping to improve people's lives and livelihoods.

CPD undoubtedly met these criteria. As indicated by its website description, CPD is known as a "leading institution for in-depth research and dialogue to promote inclusive policymaking in Bangladesh, and strengthen regional and global economic integration". Its vision of "creating an inclusive society based on equity, justice, fairness and good governance" aligned very closely with TTI's vision.

Within a few months of CPD joining the TTI community of policy research institutions, a launch event took place close to Delhi, bringing together researchers from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. This was my first opportunity to meet two individuals who would soon play significant parts in my professional life in the coming years, *Dr Debapriya (Deb) Bhattacharya*, and *Professor Mustafizur Rahman*.

In one of the first dialogues with the TTI supported institutions at the launch, Deb Bhattacharya made an impassioned speech noting the inherent power imbalances that exist in the global research ecosystem. He highlighted that researchers in the global South consistently experience power asymmetries in their relationships with funders and research institutions in the global North, and their experiences, evidence and knowledge rarely are given the same visibility and credibility in global debates and policy dialogues as northern-based researchers. This struck me very powerfully as an issue that TTI's support could help to address, whilst recognizing that it is challenging to tackle deeply rooted structural inequities within research ecosystems and that the pathway to genuine transformation is long.

Deb, and CPD colleagues drew strongly however on their history of effective advocacy and policy engagement at national, regional and international levels. Indeed, as noted on the CPD website, over many years “the Centre has positioned itself as an internationally reputed think tank addressing regional and global policymaking through strategic partnership while serving national needs”. This link between national, regional and global policy issues became central to the emergence of the Southern Voice network of think tanks, initially consisting of institutions supported by the TTI program, but which now, ten years later, has demonstrated its ability to inform, engage and shape global policy, particularly relating to the SDGs.

With the excellent leadership that it has received over time, and its consistent attention to quality and engagement, CPD has continued its impressive trajectory and credibility as not only a leading Bangladesh think tank, but one that holds its place with any such institution in the world today.

Deb's role as Chair of Southern Voice, bringing not only his deep knowledge of the Bangladesh and South Asia economic and trade policy context as well as his many connections with global institutions such as the WTO, and the close involvement of other CPD colleagues, including *Professors Mustafizur Rahman* and *Dr*

Fahmida Khatun, in their successive roles as CPD's Executive Director, ensured that Southern Voice not only survived but thrived.

With the excellent leadership that it has received over time, and its consistent attention to quality and engagement, CPD has continued its impressive trajectory and credibility as not only a leading Bangladesh think tank, but one that holds its place with any such institution in the world today. As their mission states, CPD seeks to “service the growing demand of civil society of Bangladesh for a demand driven and accountable development process by stimulating informed debate, generating knowledge and influencing policymaking through research, dialogue, dissemination and advocacy”.

They have achieved this through thorough, painstaking research and evidence generation. They have also demonstrated an ability to undertake highly innovative and effective communication and engagement strategies, for example their involvement in the Kolkata to Kunming (K2K) Car Rally organised to help promote bonds of connectivity and friendship among the countries along the route; their responses alongside Civil Society to the Rana Plaza tragedy which led subsequently to much needed policy change around the rights and conditions of workers in the garment industry; and their periodic reviews of progress in Bangladesh's economic development as a key element of national governance accountability are just a few examples out of a wide array of important contributions.

I have had the great pleasure of interacting with CPD colleagues over many years now in many different national contexts, policy fora, strategy meetings and TTI think tank events. This included a memorable visit to their Headquarters in Dhaka when I had the enormous privilege to meet and speak with CPD's esteemed founder and Chairman Professor Rehman Sobhan as well as other CPD colleagues.

I have witnessed personally their shared commitment to their aims, working closely with many other partners, collaborators and stakeholders in Bangladesh, the region and globally. Their contributions to the success of TTI, Southern Voice, and indeed many other networks have been enormous. I have very many fond memories of our interactions,

and I feel it a great privilege to be a collaborator, partner, supporter and friend of CPD.

I wish the entire CPD family the very best wishes on this anniversary, and continued success over the next 30 years!

Message for CPD

On the 30th anniversary of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), I am pleased to cherish and commemorate my association with an exemplary think tank that has established itself in all relevant theaters: as a global convener of LDC issues; champion of greater trade and development cooperation across South Asia; and a bold advocate of domestic policy reforms inside Bangladesh.

My debut participation at a CPD event was in 2003 when it exercised its impressive power of convocation to bring together almost all LDCs from Asia and Africa. I admired then the ambition and vision of a humble institute in a country like Bangladesh which was not quite as economically thriving as it is today. Exactly 20 years later, both our countries are now on a fortuitous march towards graduation. I have since attended numerous conferences and deepened friendships with practitioners and broadened knowledge through scholars from Bangladesh and across the region.

I have also appreciated how talent is nurtured and leadership is groomed at CPD with experienced

I have also appreciated how talent is nurtured and leadership is groomed at CPD with experienced professionals making way for younger generations. Both on style and substance, CPD is a model development think tank with varied expertise in macroeconomic and fiscal policy, trade, agriculture, gender, and governance, among others.



Swarnim Waglé, PhD

Member of Parliament and Chair of the Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), Nepal

Former Vice-Chair, National Planning Commission, and former Chief Economic Advisor, UNDP Asia-Pacific

professionals making way for younger generations. Both on style and substance, CPD is a model development think tank with varied expertise in macroeconomic and fiscal policy, trade, agriculture, gender, and governance, among others.

I pay tribute to the founding visionaries and recent cohorts of leadership for creating a truly valuable South Asian policy resource in Dhaka that remains a dutiful watchdog at home and an enviably credentialed presence abroad.

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) *Thirty Years of Research Excellence and Policy Impact*

On behalf of the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, I take this opportunity to congratulate the CPD for its unblemished record of research excellence and policy impact in Bangladesh and the wider South Asian region.

The IPS has been fortunate to be associated closely with the CPD' journey for much of its history. Whilst differing in its legal status—the IPS being a semi-government institute established by an Act of Parliament—the operational models and core research interests have been very similar. Like the CPD, the IPS sought to be financially independent, raising resources through multiple channels, including its own Endowment Fund, competitive research grant funds and commissioned research studies. And similar to the CPD, the IPS' research program aims to achieve specific goals of promoting socio-economic progress through sustainable, innovative and broad-based development.

Given these similarities in operational and research functions, it is not surprising that the CPD has emerged as one of our key regional partners, sharing knowledge, expertise and resources over a span of three decades. Along with the CPDs distinguished founder Chairman, *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, the IPS' then Executive Director, the late *Dr Saman Kelegama*, were instrumental in bringing together a network of



Dr Dushni Weerakoon, PhD

Executive Director

Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS)

like-minded economic research entities in the region to jointly work on issues of regional economic integration. Joint research and collective policy engagement to help policymakers understand the implications of various policy options contributed significantly to early successes in pushing through regional agreements related to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), amongst others.

Indeed, the success of such early efforts led to a decision to formalize such partnerships through a South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS) spearheaded by Professor Sobhan and located at the CPD, followed by a decision to launch an annual South Asia Economic Summit, hosted in turn by its member organisations. Given that the CPD is once again hosting the 14th South Asia Economic Summit in 2023 since the launch of the first Summit in Colombo by the IPS in 2008 is testament to the enduring partnerships, collaborative spirit and friendships that have been built over the course of long years. These accomplishments have been central to ensuring that Track-II policy action to support regional cooperation proceeds even in the face of official Track-I setbacks.

CPD' work and influence in shaping Bangladesh's policy landscape is well known to us in the region. The IPS has been fortunate too to be a part of the CPDs outreach beyond its borders. I am confident that in the next phase of growth, with its own head office and expanded capacity, the CPD will continue to thrive and build on its regional and global reputation.

The IPS was also fortunate to engage closely with the CPD through other networks. One of the most crucial of these was the selection of both organizations to be recipients of a globally competitive core grant funding under the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) administered by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada. As two of the South Asian grantees from amongst 50 selected think tanks spanning Latin America, West Africa, East Africa and South Asia over a 10-year grant period (2010-2019), knowledge-sharing

of best practices further strengthened IPS' ties of friendship with the CPD team.

Indeed, while our professional ties with the CPD have been justly rewarding, it is the related personal friendships between us and the CPD team that we cherish the most. At no point was this more appreciated than at the unfortunate and unexpected demise of *Dr Saman Kelegama* in 2017. In what we now know to be the true spirit of CPD—led by its Chairman *Professor Rehman Sobhan*, Executive Director *Dr Fahmida Khatun* and former Executive Directors and current Distinguished Fellows, *Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya* and *Professor Mustafizur Rehman* and the rest of the CPD team—a special session to honor the memory of Saman Kelegama was organized at the Seventh South Asian Regional Meeting of the Think Tank Initiative convened by the CPD in 2018, at which members of Dr Kelegama's family too were invited and hosted by the CPD.

I am confident that these enduring friendships and professional links will continue with the next generation of leaders at both the IPS and the CPD. The CPD' work and influence in shaping Bangladesh's policy landscape is well known to us in the region. The IPS has been fortunate too to be a part of the CPDs outreach beyond its borders. I am confident that in the next phase of growth, with its own head office and expanded capacity, the CPD will continue to thrive and build on its regional and global reputation. We, at the IPS, wish our friends and colleagues at the CPD every success in this journey.

Memory of My First Few Weeks at CPD

My journey at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) started in mid-July 2001, at a time when the organization was preparing for a three-day event titled Election 2001: National Policy Forum, with the Prothom Alo and the Daily Star as partners. This was the biggest ever event organized by the CPD till then.

Just about a week into my joining, I was handed over the responsibility to implement the program with only an intern as my assistant. However, I was assured that the entire office, including the Executive Director (ED) and the Research Director (RD), would extend their all-out support to me in organizing the program.

To recall, from the Chairman to the Doorman, CPD had hardly 20 people on its staff list at the time. The event was only a month away and I was new to the job, with absolutely no exposure to the ways a non-government organization, and a think tank for that matter, actually worked. I had to learn the CPD style of communication and networking. And I hardly knew any of the high-profile participants who were to be invited to the event.

It was the period of second Caretaker Government of Bangladesh. The National Election was two and half months away from the time I joined



Anisatul Fatema Yousuf

Former Director, Dialogue & Communication Division, CPD
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the CPD and the country was facing a major political crisis. Following the history of confrontational nature of our political system, the leaders of the two major political parties, Bangladesh Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), could not be persuaded to sit together to discuss national problems and election issues despite the pressure from all quarters. The critical issue at that point was, as would be anticipated, the holding of a credible election.

Readers of this write-up would be aware that the CPD, from its very inception, had been trying to promote constructive engagement with participation of lawmakers and leaders of opposing political views, government officials, experts and academics and civil society representatives and other stakeholders, concerning various issues of national interest, based on research-based evidence.

The CPD event was taking place at a critical juncture of country's democratic transition. The overall objective was to create a conducive environment for the political parties to come to an understanding which would then lead to a free, fair and credible national election with participation of all political parties. The program also aimed at exposing the prospective lawmakers to major socio-economic issues and challenges facing the country, and the possible policy responses in view of those.

By every measure, the program was a great success. The inaugural session was addressed by *Mr SAMS Kibria*, former Finance Minister of the AL and *Mr Abdul Mannan Bhuiya*, General Secretary of the BNP as Special Guests, with the then President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed in attendance as the Chief Guest.

The Osmani Memorial Auditorium was overflowing with an enthusiastic audience who could not stop applauding the presence of the two leaders on one stage, shaking hands and smiling at the people present and at the cameras. It was a historic moment which was widely captured by the country's print and electronic media. All the TV channels on the evening of 20th August 2001, and the newspapers on the next day, highlighted the same photo of the memorable handshake.

Drawing on the inspiration generated by the speeches at the inaugural session, the nine dialogue sessions, simultaneously held in three venues over the next two days generated a wealth of evidence and insights for policy uptake by the newly elected government that was to be installed following the national elections. The sessions were attended by the former Ministers and lawmakers and leaders of various political parties, experts and representatives of labor, trade and business associations and various non-state actors.

Keeping the 2001 National Elections in the purview, CPD had earlier constituted sixteen Task Forces to prepare Policy Briefs on specific issues. These Task Forces included leading professionals, experts and civil society activists of the country. The Briefs focused on issues that demanded urgent attention of policymakers and offered concrete suggestions to address the concerns.

The idea was to provide inputs to the political discourse during the election campaigns which would then inform and influence the policies of the next government. The reports of these Task Forces were presented at the dialogue sessions and were discussed and commented upon by a large number of participants. The closing session was addressed by Mr Abdul Jalil, General Secretary of the AL and Mr Abdul Mannan Bhuiya, General Secretary of the BNP.

The Osmani Memorial Auditorium was overflowing with an enthusiastic audience who could not stop applauding the presence of the two leaders (Mr SAMS Kibria and Mr Abdul Mannan Bhuiya) on one stage, shaking hands and smiling at the people present and at the cameras. It was a historic moment which was widely captured by the country's print and electronic media.

CPD can genuinely claim to have contributed to two positive outcomes through this event—initiating a series of informed discussions during the run up to the national elections, and promoting greater understanding between the political parties contesting for power which led to inclusive and fairly peaceful elections.

In those first four weeks at the CPD, I had learned firsthand how these twin objectives of its civic activism

were attained. And these were achieved due to exceptionally hard work of the CPD staff, at all levels. The CPD program team worked with support from an able and dynamic leadership, under the inspiring guidance of its founding Chairman *Professor Rehman Sobhan*.

The success of the event was possible because of the high level of commitment of all at the CPD to bring about positive changes and advance the interests of the country. Organization of the event also taught me about the role of leadership, how important it is to keep the juniors motivated in carrying out their assigned responsibilities all the way through, in spite of formidable pressure and many challenges.

The CPD program team would regularly review the progress of activities at around 10:00 PM in the presence of the ED and the RD. The readers will probably be surprised to know that there were days when they also joined hands in preparing the invitation cards for hand delivery by the CPD staff early next morning. I must also recall that it was on one of those nights that my colleagues celebrated my birthday at the CPD dialogue room, at 11:00 pm, with a large cake to feed all the staff. It was a special celebration indeed.

With the rich experience of organizing the aforementioned event, and the confidence that I gained in the process, in those early days, I was able to soldier on to meet many other challenges over the next years. Along with CPD I marched on.

It is heartening to see that as CPD celebrates the three decades of its remarkable journey, it has continued to remain faithful to its mission and vision, imbued by an unwavering commitment to contribute to building a just and fair society in Bangladesh where the fruits of socio-economic development will be shared by all people, and not merely a few. It is equally encouraging to see that a new generation of CPDians has joined my colleagues from those days, demonstrating exceptional commitment, dedication and enthusiasm for all that CPD stands for.

I am so proud that I had the good fortune of being a part of this unique organization and its unique journey, for almost two decades. These years have been a most satisfying and cherished time in my professional life.

Dialogues can be very exciting, and that recognition came to me forcefully when I was an undergraduate in Cambridge, many decades ago. The presence of Rehman Sobhan as a fellow student had a great deal to do with my new sense of enjoying conversation and speculation on how the world from India to Europe was changing.

I spent a great deal of time having conversations of a great many kinds with Rehman, at a time when we were both thinking about the future of the country we were attached to.

Rehman went on to become a world-famous teacher and researcher, along with a leader of political change and an exceptional force in making people think about what the world needed and what we can each do to bring about radical changes. The discussions included individual ideas as well as necessary thinking by dedicated groups.

It is a matter of great delight for me to think of what the Centre for Policy Dialogue does today, led by Rehman Sobhan, in light of the powerful thinking that we got from the circle of dialogue led by Rehman in Cambridge a long time ago.

I am privileged to have been a significant beneficiary of the good things that conversations produce in the world, especially when led by splendid thinkers.

- Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen



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