

## Annual Review, 2017

### Society, Culture and Sports

In the socio-cultural context of Bangladesh in the last 2017 many notable events have taken place. Many of these events have been widely discussed among the people while some events also been criticized. The important events of last year have been discussed below:

Divorce and separation have increased in the last year. There was no notable and effective initiative to prevent it. The trend of child marriage has declined and public awareness against that one has increased. Adolescent girls are more aware than ever before. The 'Child Marriage Restraint Act-1929' of the British period has been repealed and a new law titled as "Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2017" has been passed in the parliament. According to the law, the minimum age of marriage for boys and girls remained the same, i.e. 18 and 21 years, but an opportunity has also been created to marry earlier in "special circumstances". But what will be the special circumstance and at what minimum age one can marry has not been cleared in the law. Achievement of the 'International Women of Courage Award (IWC) by *Sharmin Akther*, a girl of *Rajapur* has added a new dimension to prevent child marriage. Furthermore, the breakdown of joint families and formation of nuclear families is growing day by day.

The amounts of allowances like old-age and widow, etc. has been increased under government social safety net. But no provision of allowance has been made for the **childless widows**, though Bangladesh Institute of Social Research Trust has been advocating for it for a long time. It is possible to implement this only with a circular of the related ministry. The average life expectancy has been increased in Bangladesh. The number of old age homes is increasing but the negative attitude of common people against that also prevailing. Even the old people cannot accept it easily.

In 2017, public awareness on the Parent's Care Act of 2013 has increased. However, campaigning of this issue is not as much noticeable as it is necessary to promote. Like previous years cases on this issue was continued and its effectiveness was also noticeable. In this regard, three people have been arrested for the first time at Cox's Bazar last year.

International migration has been increasing continuously. But anxiety has increased among the KSA immigrants due to imposition of excessive tax. Women immigration has also

increased. The security issue of women working abroad has been discussed in various ways throughout the year.

The trend of wearing *hijab* was continuing in the last year. Use of *hijab* with diverse fashion has been increased. The tendency of visiting India for shopping during Eid, Puja and other social programs has been increased among the middle class people. Celebration of social activities has increased in the last year because of the political stability. Besides, internal tourism, such as go for vacation in various places of the country with friends and family has also increased. The first specialized tourism park of Bangladesh has been established in the *Jaliyar Dwip* in *Naf* River in *Teknaf*. This tourist spot was inaugurated as ‘Naf Tourism Park’ in the last year.

A lot of news related to BFDC and TV shows has been discussed widely throughout the year. Discussions and criticisms continued on joint film production, death of the legendary hero *Naikraj Rajjak* and news of the child of Shakib-Apu couple as well as their divorce. The end of the marital bond of Tahsan and Mithila was also a matter of discussion among the media lovers. Beside this, the popularity of Indian TV shows remained unchanged. The trend of local performances including *Jatra*, circus and *Jarigan* has been decreased while on the other hand the concert and modern music culture has increased among the youth. The popularity of talk show has decreased and general people have gradually lost their confidence in the information disseminated in the shows as well. Use of distorted blend of English and Bangla language has been reduced in the privately-owned radios. But the use of unnecessary English language in Television has remained the same.

Earnings of players have been increased in the last year. On the other hand, the success of women in the SAFF Championship has been regarded as one of the greatest achievements. In future, it will play a positive role for women to participate in sports. In 2017, the success was less in Cricket compared to 2015 and 2016, though two of our cricketers were placed in the ICC world XI ranking for the first time. In case of the disables’ sports, the rate of success was lower than the past years. The country had no remarkable success in Olympics in the last year.

Young people gained more acceptability and popularity rather than the elderly in leading politics. Awareness has increased among the mass people on religious terrorism.

At the end of the year, visit of the artificially intelligent women robot *Sofia* was one of the major attractions among the common people. The conversation of Honorable Prime Minister with Sofia had been widely discussed in different social media.

Some 18 oppressed *Birangona* (war-heroine) has given the recognition of the Freedom Fighter in the last year. Total number of Birangona Freedom Fighters is now 188. This recognition was one of the most significant events of the last year. Apart from this, 58 *Shobdo Shoinik* (artistes fighter) of Bangladesh Betar and *Sanskritik Sangstha* formed during the Liberation War were recognized as Freedom Fighters.

The *Rohingya* issue was one of the most discussed events among the common people of Bangladesh in the last year. Social crisis of *Rohingya* refugees and its impact at the local level have been discussed as a concerning issue among the public. A 19-point repatriation agreement has been signed between Myanmar and Bangladesh which was one of the most important events. Concerns about communal harmony are still continuing.

In the education sector, the question paper leak continued in the last year, which is widely criticized by the people. A project has been undertaken to create permanent campus for administering activities under the *Fazil* and *Kamil* Madrasa education. No remarkable information has been recorded on improvement of the quality of universities. But the only research institute in Bangladesh - BIDS was ranked at number 104 in the latest world ranking, which was earlier within 100.

### **Economic Review**

According to the world bank (December, 2017) in the case of gross domestic product (GDP) Bangladesh placed at number 44. Besides, Bangladesh placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in jute production, 4<sup>th</sup> in rice production and 12<sup>th</sup> in tea production. GDP growth rate of Bangladesh has reached 7.24% in 2017 while in 2016 the growth rate was 7.11%. This 7.28% growth rate is the highest GDP growth rate of Bangladesh after the independence. Like previous years, major contribution of growth has come from the service and industrial sectors.

Along with GDP growth rate, per capita GDP also improved in fiscal year 2017-18. While in the last fiscal year (2016-17) per capita GDP was USD 1,466, in current fiscal year the GDP per capita raised to USD 1,602. This also breaks all the previous records of GDP per capita.

The labour force survey (March, 2017) of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) accords that 2.6 million (2.18%) of the total 62.1 million labour force are unemployed. However, according to the World Bank (December 2017) unemployment rate of Bangladesh is around 2.10%. Although unemployment is a major problem in Bangladesh for last 10 years, yet, there is no significant plan to reduce unemployment in the 7<sup>th</sup> 5 year plan. It is important to have national policy and strategy like other developing countries. Combined initiative of all the sections is also important to eradicate national unemployment. If a single organization monitor and take responsibility to combine all the government organizations for reducing unemployment, the task could be easier. Unemployment allowance will also be a good initiative in this regard.

Just after the liberation, poverty rate of Bangladesh was around 84% which was reduced to 31.5% in 2010. According to BBS (March, 2017), the present poverty rate is 24.8% in Bangladesh. The report also revealed that around 12.9% people are below lower poverty line (extreme poor) while it was only 13.7% in the last year. In aggregate, Bangladesh achieved success in poverty reduction. However, income inequality has increased in recent years. First 10% top rich people earn 26.9% of the total income while bottom 10% earn 3.8% of the total income. Hence, top 10% rich people earn 8 times more than bottom 10%. Policy-makers should take care of that. At least it is important to reduce inequality of opportunity if we cannot reduce income inequality.

The average inflation has been around 5.5 percent in last year. Especially, food inflation increased because of agricultural loss due to flood. Food inflation increased 7.62% at October 2017 and later it was reduced to 7.13% in December. However, food inflation could not impact significantly on the total inflation rate due to quick necessary steps undertaken by the government after the flood situation.

In budget proposal, budget deficit continues in this fiscal year as well. In fiscal year 2017-18, the total budget deficit is BDT 112,276 crore. This is 28% of the total budget. Around BDT 60,352 crore **budget deficit** will be managed from domestic sources (banking sector, savings certificate and other non-banking sources) and remaining BDT 51,924 crore will be collected from external sources. However, the budgeting system has not been changed yet. Budgeting system is not efficient as there is a scope of misuse of fund and therefore, defective. It is better to follow needs based budget rather than existing budgeting method.

The external sector has been a strength of the Bangladesh economy for several years. This has changed in recent years. Export growth in FY 2016-17 was only 1.7% while the target was 8%. The good sign is RMG and total exports picking up during July-December of FY 2017-18. However, imports growing at a higher rate than exports led to a negative current account balance that continued during July-October of FY 2017-18. In FY 2016-17 remittance earning experienced a negative growth of (-)15.9% despite increase of manpower export. One important reason for low remittances despite high growth of manpower exports is remittances flow through informal channels. Appreciation of Bangladesh's currency against the US Dollar also played a role for low export and remittances growth to some extent. Though remittance has started to pick up in recent months it is not significant since it was negative during the last fiscal year.

To speed up the revenue collection, NBR is following the VAT Law 2012 and taking some major steps including tax fair. Besides online VAT system may reduce time and hazards for paying VAT. As per budget, the revenue target is BDT 293,494 crore and finance minister stated that BDT 248,190 crore will be collected by NBR. The targeted revenue till November 2017 was BDT 84,066.33 crore while only BDT 75,308.55 crore (89.58%) has been collected by NBR. However, all the related stakeholders have recommended for keeping the VAT rate within reach and making the payment system easier.

In 2017, share market was relatively stable. DSE index experienced its highest level ever in this year (6,336 in November, 2017). Moreover, there was no significant complain about corruption in this sector. It is a clear indication that, security exchange commission is working at their best to prevent any speculative attack in the stock market. Therefore, stock market has gained the credibility of investors and worked as 'catalyst' for improving the stock market index.

Foreign direct investment of Bangladesh also reached its highest level in 2017. In March, 2017, the foreign direct investment was USD 859.0 million. Clearly Bangladesh has enjoyed the fruit of foreign investors' credibility. Stable political environment is playing a significant role here. Most importantly, Bangladesh has cheap labor and a very big market that influenced Japan to plan for more investment in Bangladesh in 2017. Government earned credibility and focused on the opportunities in Bangladesh despite the terrorist attack in Holey Artisan Bakery in 2016.

Reserve of Bangladesh Bank has increased in 2017. The amount of foreign reserve reached USD 33,493 million in 2017. Bangladesh now can finance around eight months of imports which is higher than the minimum three-month requirement. This commendable development was initially brought about by exports and remittance outpacing imports (**current account creating balance of payments surplus**). Foreign reserve growth rate is lower compared to previous fiscal years' rate. However, there was a cyber-attack in Bangladesh Bank currency department which could not hamper the economic activities in international or domestic level. **It is now important to use the reserve for more income generating activities.**

The government has approved a new pay scale for government employees. In the new pay scale the maximum basic pay scale is BDT 78,000 and minimum is BDT 8,250. Pay scale increased almost 91 to 101 percent **in 2016-2017 fiscal year**. The new pay scale will impose a burden of over BDT 159.04 billion on the government spending in the current fiscal year. Next year government expenditure will be more than BDT 238.28 billion in this regard. Improved pay scale will definitely improve the standard of living of the government officials. However, it is not sure that whether this better salary will ensure better service from them. It has been around more than a year, government officials are enjoying the new pay scale benefit yet significant change in the provided service has not been seen. It is important for government to ensure the better quality of services as well; otherwise this huge expenditure will not be efficient.

Although in the share market, banking sector experienced its highest index in 2017, loan defaulter scenario has not been changed yet. In 2016, 10% of the total outstanding loans were defaulted and the amount of default loan was BDT 63,365 crore. In March 2017, the default loan increased to BDT 73,409 crore (15.85%). However, the amount of default loan decreased to BDT 62,172 crore (15.37%) in December 2017. Most of the banks have tried to obscure their default loan volume even though the central bank asked the commercial banks to reveal the actual loan default amount. State owned banks had largest volume of loan default, however, some private banks also had remarkable default loan in 2017 as well. In 2017, the banking sector exposed further weaknesses. Especially increase on non-performing loans, capital inadequacy and poor governance in the sector has hampered the smooth operation of the banks. The government is bearing the loss of the state owned banks. It is very unfortunate that, the government is compensating the bank defaulters with the public's

money. To overcome all these factors, central bank must play a significant strict rule here. Therefore, Bangladesh Bank needs to work with freedom and without any political pressure.

### **Political Review**

In 2017, canceling the sixteenth amendment, resignation of the Chief Justice, formation of election commission, some political movements of the BNP at the end of the year, cornered situation of *Jamaat*, discussion on election, *Rohingya* issue, the verdict of Padma bridge corruption, local government elections, monument transfer and the worldwide recognition of the speech of *Bangabandhu* are major events that took place in the political sphere of Bangladesh. Incidents which have not occurred in the year are *hartal*, blockade, murder of a major political leader, the formation or breakdown of any large political alliance or any strong movement against the government, etc.

There was no significant achievement in politics. Disagreement between the two major parties did not diminish in case of establishing the democracy. The debate on election process continued throughout the year. Discussion on democracy is still limited to elections. 'Development or Democracy?' has come to the discussion sometimes, though no party was defeated. The local government election has used the party symbol by breaking down the long-term tradition. Few people did not achieve the nomination so they did the election as a rebel candidate.

Cancellation of the sixteenth amendment has been acutely criticized inside and outside of the Parliament. It seems that general people could not perceive the clear idea about it. In continuation of this, the resignation of the Chief Justice was also a matter of discussion.

Various discussions and criticisms have been made about the formation of the Election Commission; its credibility has remained unresolved. Various registered parties discussed with the election commission about the election. Use of EVM and army recruitment in the voting system remains unresolved.

At the end of the year, BNP has been slightly active in politics. The cornered situation of the *Jamaat* was continuing. There is no tendency to increase or decrease activities of any other group or coalition. The contest has been seen in the Rangpur City Corporation election. Nobody said that there was any major irregularity. The Election Commission successfully accomplished few additional local level elections including this.

The government and suspected individuals felt relieved after getting the verdict of *Padma Bridge*. Different kinds of comments have come from different levels of people on this before. It can be assumed that the debate has ended through this verdict. The set up and transformation of statue in front of the Supreme Court was in the forefront of discussions for the time being.

The *Rohingya* problem has stirred the country people. Everyone was widely inspired to provide humanitarian assistance toward them. Different countries of the world tried to stand beside them, though few were not interested. With the diplomatic effort of the government, it has been possible to sign an agreement with Myanmar to bring the *Rohingya* back.

In the last year, the 7<sup>th</sup> March speech of *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman* has achieved the UNESCO recognition which has been considered as an important achievement of Bangladesh. On October 30, UNESCO announced the 7<sup>th</sup> March speech of *Bangabandhu* to be listed in the Memory of the World International Register. It is regarded as “one of the major international achievement” by the people of the country. However, the year ended with political uncertainty.

### **Law and Order Situation**

In 2017 the overall law and order situation was better partially than earlier times. But crimes were constantly changing in terms of its trends, nature and categories. From the crime statistics of Bangladesh Police it is noticeable that the number of committing crimes and killings or murders has decreased in 2017 in comparison with 2015. Presently, the increase rates of crimes and killings or murders are -69% and -10% respectively where according to BBS the population growth rate in 2017 was 1.32%.

Major law and order related issues of last year were: creation of two divisions named as ‘Public Security Division’ and ‘Security Service Division’ by reforming the Ministry of Home Affairs; passing 24 laws including child marriage restraint act; reformation of the International Crime Tribunal; Regulatory Guidelines for Mobile Financial Services (MFS); resignation of chief justice of high court; and finalizing draft security policy. Major hearings of last year are hearing on sixteenth amendment; 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> hearing of International Crime Tribunal; hearing on *Pilkhana* killing; formulation of the 39-point Code of Conduct of judges; hearing on the period of imprisonment for life and inclusion of the time of custody in



the imprisonment, etc. Moreover for maintaining the law and order situation, the approval of commando unit and anti-terrorism unit in Police has notable contribution which is reflecting by the decrease rate of crimes and murders. The way how Bangladesh Police is controlling terrorism and crimes is recognized as a model in many countries. According to the international assessment to combat money laundering and financing for terrorism, out of 142 countries the position of Bangladesh was 82 and according to the Corruption Perception Index, Bangladesh placed at 145 from the top. Activities of community policing has played significant role on developing police-community partnership. Others activities like getting help in terms of police, fire service and ambulance facilities from emergency call to 999 has provided positive feedbacks. BISR (2017) has found from a study that 80% people are satisfied with the police performance.

Most notable crimes of recent times were murder or killings (by beating, strangling, **murder by buried alive**, slaughtering, etc.), sexual harassment, rape, women and children suppression, adultery, disappearance, human trafficking, corruption, drug addiction, cyber-crime, etc. Besides, snatching has also increased in the last period of 2017. But it is quite difficult to define which crime is occurring more and why because of not conducting national crime victimization survey. Besides, the total number of on-going cases is approximately 2.7 million where the number of judges is only 1,397 (1,969 cases is for each judge). In this regard BISR has found in a study that it is possible to eradicate this problem by using the judicial court model of Dhaka or Mymensingh.

The distorted form of women and children violence was also noticeable in the last year. For example, it was claimed that Arafat Hossan, a little boy of Naogaon was murdered by arson. In Shariatpur an infant of six months were killed due to a clash with a neighbor woman. A child labor was brutally murdered by **air pushing into his belly** in a cotton industry of Narayonganj. An increased trend of rape can be found from the review of data from 2011 and 2012. A lot of women were being victims of dowry, trafficking and rape. Girls like Bushra, Simi, Indrani, Mahia, Trisha and Fahima committed suicide for being unable to bear the suffering of teasing and repression of the community deviants.

## **Environment**

Last year 2017, the environmental issues that drew the attention of the people were improving water quality of Buriganga, the start of construction of Rampal power plant,

relocation of Hazaribagh tannery, havoc in haor areas of Sylhet, worsening condition of Dhaka as one of the most air polluted city, land-sliding due to heavy rainfall in the hill tract areas, extinction of Bengal Slow Loris, putting the Cox's Bazar under limelight in Bangladesh and abroad with a 3-day long event named "The Longest Walk 2017", the probable impact on environment for *Rohingya* relocation, Department of Environment fined 7 industries and finally end of the year the discovery of water reservoir in Savar.

Last year one of the positive incidents discussed initially was the improving water quality of Buriganga River. Department of Environment published that the dissolve oxygen level increased into .01ml/L in the month of March-April where it was zero in the first two months of the year, and in the month of December it increased upto 2.3ml/L. The relocation of tannery from Hazaribagh was highlighted in news in the country. According to the researchers' observation the relocation of tannery industries was the main reason that has improved the water quality of Buriganga.

To put the limelight on Cox's Bazar an event named "The Longest Walk 2017" was appreciated by people of different levels. Last year Department of Environment fined 7 industries for polluting environment. End of the year the discovery of a fresh water reservoir in Savar was good news for all.

The "Biodiversity Law" was formulated in 2017 for the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of the resources. Development along with the conservation of biodiversity was a great initiative for the present times.

Death of fish due to havoc in haor areas of Sylhet division was one of the most devastating incidents in the last year. According to the researchers, total 6 districts were affected by the flash flood which flooded 219,840 hectares of land that damaged 2,860 houses entirely and 15,345 partially. It also damaged livelihood components and infrastructure along with fisheries resources, birds, domestic animals especially the cows and ducks also. A wider area of cropping field especially the paddy field submerged and got rotten. Rotting rice steam produced ammonia gas which resulted in killing of about 800 MT of fishes. Bengal Slow Loris, endangered species which locally called as "Lojjaboti Banor" are on the verge of disappearing due to extensive deforestation which also made experts worried about the environmental impact of deforestation. Few people died along with army person during the rescued period because of the land sliding in the hill tracks. Researchers have also assumed

that environmental degradation will take place in the coming years as a result of *Rohingya* settlement.

Bangladesh is already experiencing increased intensity of extreme climatic events like tropical cyclones, river erosion, floods, landslides and droughts. This country is vulnerable due to its unique geographic location, dominance of floodplains, lower elevation from the sea, high population density and overwhelming dependence on natural resources. The impact sectors include: water resources, agriculture and food security, ecosystems and biodiversity, human health and coastal livelihood and economy.

In 2017, Bangladesh has experienced hotter summer. During UN Climate Change Conference, BONN 2017, Petteri Taalas, Secretary General of WMO mentioned 2015, 2016 and 2017 were the top three years in terms of temperature records comparing pre-industrial era. Jennifer Morgan, executive director of Greenpeace International has emphasized immediate climate action against summer heat. The WMO report has identified the extreme event's effects on food security of millions of people, especially the most vulnerable regions.