

## Increased remittance inflow

*A good sign for the economy*

It is welcome news that remittance inflow has increased substantially in the 11 months of the current fiscal year. The development is particularly significant since it was feared not long ago that the war on Iraq and the worldwide recession would adversely affect this inflow, putting further pressure on the economy. But the prospects of the sector now look much brighter.

Bankers have said that the measures adopted by the central bank to check hundi have paid dividends in the form of increased remittance earning. Obviously, it was necessary to curb the business, which accounted for illegal transfer of a huge amount of money.

Apart from indicating a steady rise in the income of Bangladeshis working abroad, the remittance inflow will also play a role in strengthening the foreign exchange reserves position. So there are good signs for the economy, which had to absorb the shock of the Iraq war and the looming threat of a global recession.

The job markets abroad are apparently shifting from a few countries that accommodated the bulk of our job seekers to new and hitherto unexplored grounds. In the past, few people from Bangladesh worked in the countries like Botswana or Madagascar. But the job market has widened and this will help lessen our dependence on South Korea, Malaysia and a few Middle Eastern countries, which have traditionally been the main job providers for Bangladeshi workers.

However, the whole issue of finding job markets for Bangladeshis must be brought under better planning and coordination. Today it is an extremely competitive area where lack of planning and preparation could be a big disadvantage. But in our case even the recruiting system is still not well defined and safe for the prospective job seekers. Many of them are still swindled by fake recruiting agents.

The increased remittance inflow is a good indicator of Bangladeshis abroad playing their due role in the economic uplift of the country. However, the government should also do its bit in exploring new job markets for its big workforce. The strategy is now part of other manpower-exporting countries' policies and plans.

## Environment Court sitting idle

*Why so few cases before it?*

THE simple fact that only three cases in Dhaka and four in Chittagong are pending at the Environment Court, despite hundreds of instances of polluting our environment, shows the actual lack of commitment and sincerity. Not just on the part of the authorities, but also others concerned. Elaborate programmes were organised to mark World Environment Day; ministers, experts spoke eloquently on protecting our environment, but one of the most important components to ensure that has been lying idle. What an irony! One just has to look around to see an examples galore of violating the environmental law with impunity. Why legal actions are not being sought against the offenders?

The procedure is, one has to file a written complaint about the violation of law to the environment department upon which an inquiry is instituted by it. Then the matter is taken to the court on the basis of its merit. But thanks to 'investigation' by three inspectors, only a handful number of cases have been filed. Therefore the little but more than a year old environment court in the capital has remained under-used. What baffles us is, why did the Department of Environment (DoE) failed to file so few cases when there had been more than 1200 complaints of gross violation of the environmental law? Are we supposed to take it for granted that almost all of those complaints were baseless?

We have it on good authority that some dishonest officials of the environment department are mainly responsible for fewer complaints making it to the court. The whole purpose of establishing a separate judicial set-up to protect our surroundings has got lost. It's now obvious that only increasing public awareness on the issue can bring about any significant change. We think that the legal side of the awareness is also necessary in this case; NGOs can take a lead in this matter. At the same time, there should be more public interest litigation to safeguard our surroundings. The highest court has so given suo moto rulings on environment protection, but they don't seem to be enough. It's high time we all got together and made our environment safe not for just ourselves but also for our future generations.

# Slight thaw in India-Pakistan relations



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

APRIL has seen the end of one war in West Asia and the faint stirring of peace in South Asia. Hopeful signs have arrived on a stage which is not only suffering from the scourge of poverty but is also hostage to religious communalism and mutual suspicion.

Having two nuclear powers totally at unease with each other has not helped. A graded missile race has also cast its own shadow on the more than one billion people who inhabit this region.

It was as such a most welcome gesture when in April the Indian Prime Minister expressed his desire to ease relations with Pakistan. This was followed immediately after with a telephone call on 28 April by the Pakistan Prime Minister. This reciprocity was indeed significant given the total break-down situation for the last year and half. This has permitted cautious optimism to creep into the scenario.

The other encouraging aspect has been President Musharraf's suggestion that if India-Pakistan talks were to resume, 'victory would be neither mine nor Prime Minister Vajpayee's. It would be the victory of negotiation and dialogue'. At the same time, the Pakistan Prime Minister has also gone on record saying that Pakistan, if necessary, would walk 'the extra mile'. In addition to all these statements has been the crucial assertion by the Pakistan Foreign Minister that the 'army and the military Inter-Services-Intelligence of Pakistan also supports the recent flurry of exchanges between the two rivals'. Fortunately, by implication, efforts are being made to avoid one-upmanship.

What is required now is confidence building between these neighbours. From that point of view,

the Indian decision to restore diplomatic ties and air-links with Pakistan will be helpful steps. This will assist and facilitate the process. However, both countries now need to take a step back and carefully plan future approaches. This time round, they should try to do it right.

Since July 2001, recriminations have flown across the border of these two countries. The national mind-sets have hardened over perceived points of interest with regard to each other's security needs. Now is the time to listen to friends in the immediate region as well as from further away. It is only discussion and dialogue that can pave the way forward, not coercive diplomacy. South Asian countries have watched with care and witnessed the disappointment that followed the encouraging bus journey of Vajpayee to Lahore in February 1999 and President Musharraf's visit to Agra in July 2001.

The important thing today is that these two countries appear to be going back to the state of bilateral relations that had existed prior to the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament and are now at least exploring the possibility of setting in motion a dialogue process. Punitive measures put in place since then will possibly be slowly rolled back. There is now a glint of sunshine in the horizon.

The immediate reaction of Vajpayee to Jamal's invitation suggests that the Indian leadership is not going to be rushed into talks. They are going to proceed slowly. There is no harm in this. In fact, in a way this is constructive. In a letter addressed to the Pakistan Prime Minister, Vajpayee has, as expected, stressed that a conducive atmosphere for dialogue is required. Through this, it has been indicated that 'alleged cross-border terrorism and dismantling of terrorist infrastructure' by Pakistan would help. What is important is that the Indian Prime Minister responded in writing.

He might have told the Indian Parliament that 'Pakistan's Prime Minister has invited me. I did not accept it. I don't want to say anything further'. Facts however imply that India is willing to make official-level contact with Pakistan on talks, but an interaction at the highest level is probably right now not in the cards.

India possibly wants a step-by-step engagement. This means that India will agree to preparatory contacts at the level of senior officials within a few weeks to do the initial spadework like setting an agenda and working out dates and venues for subsequent meetings. As it customary, the subsequent step will, in all likelihood, be at the level of foreign secretaries of both countries. They will try to review modalities and prepare the ground for talks between their respective Foreign Ministers. It is only after the meetings of the two Foreign Ministers that both sides will feel comfortable enough to convene a Summit between their Prime Ministers.

These are particularly sensitive times and the engagement of US

Secretary of State Colin Powell and his Deputy Armitage will bring much needed encouragement to both parties. Recent developments between these two countries have delighted the United States Administration which played a pivotal role in heading off in recent times the prospect of a disastrous war between the two nuclear-armed rivals who both had their fingers on the trigger button. The US has been applying firm pressure for months to persuade India and Pakistan to return from the brink of confrontation. One can only hope that the US will now engage itself fully in nurturing the path to peace and promoting better understanding.

The US Administration has a unique advantage as both these countries prize their relationship with Washington as the centre-piece of their foreign policy. Of the two, India sees itself as the natural ally of the US because of its common democratic heritage with Washington and its growing economic and hi-tech relationship with US companies. Its diaspora has also emerged with enhanced influence in domestic US

politics. Pakistan has also gained a special niche because of her open support for the US led war on terror in Afghanistan. This has made this country a strategic ally of the United States.

Leaderships in both these countries are hostages to the Kashmir question. Pakistan continues to assert that they are seriously seeking 'a peaceful resolution of all disputes and differences, especially the core dispute over Kashmir'. This of course is a sticking point. It will take vision and courage to find a solution, but till that takes place, there are various areas which could benefit through people-to-people contact.

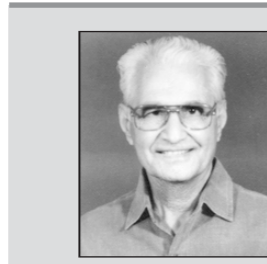
It has been reported in the press that the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy has undertaken a visit to India and some of its members included Pakistani parliamentarians. They discussed informally peace and democracy with some of their Indian counterparts. I believe that this exercise will be helpful. It is the right kind of brick to place in the edifice of cooperation.

We perhaps need to re-read our history once again. As an initial step, the leadership of India and Pakistan could agree on the resumption of their sports links. Cricket and field hockey are admired and played in both countries. Flexibility could restore matches and also improve their respective competitive edges vis-à-vis other playing nations.

It was reassuring in this context to see our Government welcoming the current initiative between these two countries. Foreign Minister Khan has correctly described this as 'constructive' and an example of 'maturity' in respective leaderships. Bangladesh as a firm believer in peace in South Asia has always under every Administration, lent its support for easing of tension between Pakistan and India. We strongly believe that South



# Journalism sans frontiers



M B NAQVI  
writes from Karachi

ONE has grown old hearing lectures that journalists have this great role or that vital role to play. Political leaders, mostly those in office -- power is more elusive for Pakistani politicians --, have large intellectual and political interests and want the journalists to help them. Thus they appeal to journalists to help forge national unity for the sake of country's security and progress. Sometimes moral sermons are administered by usually those whose own career does not stand witness to high moral principles or consistency. Social evils, moral degradation and external dangers are the most frequent causes the achievement of which is sought to be facilitated by journalists helping attain these laudable objectives.

But a closer look reveals the true purpose: these high-minded aims are assumed to be the objective of the speaking leaders and the real role of journalists is to strengthen their hand by urging the people to support them. Behind their beautiful verbiage is the design to recruit journalists to become their dream

beaters and latter day version of town criers proclaiming their goodness in power. Appeals to patriotism, Islam, ideology, national chauvinism are deployed to make journalists ignore the voice of their conscience and to support the politicians in office -- and occasionally some in opposition.

One is tired of saying to anyone who would care to listen that journalists have no, repeat no, role in achieving any of the seemingly noble causes. This is for moralists, social reformers, religious and

thereon according to his lights (conscience).

Journalism is intended to reflect the real situation. Truth telling is the norm for an honest professional. As an individual he has many feelings and perhaps loyalties. He may want to work for social welfare or to promote good public morals. But let him do these things as an individual. Insofar as he is a journalist, the value to guide professional work is to report factually and or make a fair comment on an objectively delineated situation. His personal enthusiasm for

*raison d'etre* is to put a desired spin on facts; they spread part truth and part propaganda all the time, when they are not spawning actual disinformation. Has anyone looked into these ministries' and myriad provincial departments', and of nearly all big public sector enterprises, budgets? On what is all this big money spent? Who is the intended beneficiary, leaving aside the sustenance of bureaucracy? Much of it is spent on 'cultivating' reporters and columnists. Some do informally become 'embedded', thus violating profes-

Let no one run away with the notion that South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) has come of age or that its impact has improved things. Situation of the media, especially electronic, in this region, -- which nature has designed as a distinctive region -- is unspeakable. As a result of sharp differences, military tensions among the states of the region and veritable civil wars in some states, electronic media on the whole, and in many cases the press also, has enthusiastically participated in the politics of which-

ment's or other partisan, line. Let it be said that the Pakistani squad was more confirmist with many notable exceptions than any other group. While there were many who wanted to be more critical in describing the national situation, there were a few 'heavy weights' who prevailed for the sake of good humoured unanimity. Apparently they were weighed down by their perceived national responsibilities. One wondered why a national consensus was required in an international professional organisation; simple majority view ought to prevail everywhere.

God knows that India and Pakistan, or the two warring sides in Sri Lanka or Nepal, need to be brought closer to each other and, if possible, enabled to make them friends. This is a noble aim. But it is not for SAFMA to achieve. Insofar as India and Pakistan enmity is concerned, it is for other organisations like Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy or Pakistan Peace Coalition to try to reconcile them. SAFMA ought to be a journalists' professional organisation where they should merely compare notes over the media's situation and problems faced in each country of the region. If this process produces some beneficial fallout or byproduct, well it is welcome. That will be a byproduct or side benefit. SAFMA needs to concern itself only with professional matters, especially professional ethics.

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## PLAIN WORDS

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political leaders to popularise their own nostrums. Journalists' only duty is to be professionally honest and efficient. Just that. You have a right to query what is the moral or professional duty of a journalist: can he be amoral or immoral? No, not at all. As an honest professional, he has to be guided all the time by his own conscience as a good professional. And what is the journalistic professional's main duty? Well, simple: to report fairly and objectively when he is required to comment, he should piece together the reality from a plethora of reports with varying degrees of objectivity and to make a fair and honest comment

religion or morality has to be kept separate from his professional duty of seeking facts and fair comment thereon. He or she may be interested in promoting micro credit for poverty alleviation. Let him engage in it in his or her spare time; he or she cannot become a propagandist of this or that NGO or institution (including the government).

If the criterion of truth telling, with all its implications, is accepted, then the huge and difficult issue of patriotism can be tackled. It is especially acute in Pakistan and India where big modern propaganda machines, information ministries with huge budgets, are overactive. Their

sional ethics.

There are great and praiseworthy international organisations of journalists. There is the Paris-based RSF (reporters sans frontiers). It clearly aims at what one has essayed to convey. There is the New York based Committee on the Protection of Journalists, the coverage of which is global. There is the International Press Institute. Other organisations also exist. There is one that has been established in South Asia of and for South Asian journalists. One has attended all three of its annual conferences and a pleasing experience they were.

ever was their government. Their presentation of the situation pleased their ruling elites. That situation largely persists.

This has to be purposefully noted -- not to discredit the fledgling SAFMA but to underscore what it is up against. One just reported that the third annual conference in Dhaka was a pleasant experience. The professional *bon homie* among the journalists of the five main South Asian nations was wonderful; their readiness for professional correctness was obvious. Not that there were no differences among them that gave intimation of proximity to that of their respective govern-

# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

## Cricket probe report-- some comments

I have read the probe report on the dismal performance of our cricket team during the recent World Cup published on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2003 very carefully and word by word. It tells the same story which we face in every walk of life in Bangladesh, that is lack of discipline, disrespect to superiors, political patronage. An individual's character varies with time, age, circumstances but when you take the responsibility you try to be aloof in every way to carry out the duties with 100% honesty and be a role model. But most of our Bangladeshi leaders fail to do so, let alone cricket. One learns and develops faith in "discipline" from his/her family, school, relatives and friends, and from his surroundings. Just take a look around to find any good example of discipline! In our society, everywhere you will see 'muscle-flexing', nepotism, and questions like "who are you to tell me?", be it in a primary school or in a university, or in sports, culture or politics. In conclusion, it is the moral

degradation of our society we live in starting from the so-called national leaders to the bottom. There are exceptions also but their voices are neither united nor loud to be heard. The press is also to be blamed to mislead the society by portraying and giving some players, models, artists, writers, academicians the status of "mega-stars" (with few exceptions), the status they do not deserve. Take any discipline, be it art and culture, sports, academics everywhere the story is the same. The journalists should be analytical to use the information to differentiate between a one-time "honey bok mara" and consistencies, capabilities, leadership qualities of the individuals they put in the front page or write articles about and not just become a part of the "hujuey bangal".

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## Rising crime rate

The recent spate of daring daylight bank robberies belies the government's contention that all is well on

the law-and-order front. On the contrary, things seem to get worse by the day.

It is obvious to me that the government's anti-crime drive-- the so-called Operation Clean Heart-- was nothing more than a dog-and-pony show, resulting in more hardship for Bangladeshis, including a number of dubious deaths those unlucky to be in army and police custody. And to add insult to injury, the government quickly passed an indemnity bill, exonerating those responsible for violating human rights.

Given the current situation is Operation Clean Heart II in the offing?

**Niraj Agarwala**  
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**Israel and the Arabs**  
It is the very characteristic of the Arab societies to blame all of their ills on Israel. The Palestine question notwithstanding, Arab societies find it almost impossible to practice intolerance. Saddam, Assad, Arafat, Qaddafi, King Hussein, King Faisal-- the list of thugs are endless.

Yet they manage to portray themselves as heroes (!) because of their anti-Semitism.

Even a great statesman like President Nasser succumbed to the temptation of hate-politics. The thug regimes survive by two means: sheer brutality and blaming everything on some convenient scapegoat. In this case Israel.

Israel had been at the receiving end of this hate mongering since 1948. Why is it a crime to be Jewish in the eyes of the Arabs? Will anyone please answer? Palestinians have suffered both at the hands of Israel and its neighbours. However, Intifada did not result in a response of the like of King Hussein in 1970 when Palestinians were massacred by the Jordanian Army.

When the Falange, Druse, Sunnis and Shias each took their turn in killing the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, the Arab/Muslim world remained effectively mute. The obvious victims are the Palestinians and the Israelis, both forced into a game of life and death because their Arab neighbours

cannot go past their anti-Semitism.

## Police force: Efficient or inefficient?

On June 5, two news items on the first page of a widely circulated daily drew my attention. One of the items informed that 58 persons were taken to custody in connection to the murder of a police personnel. Another news item informed us that even after 74 days of Nasima's murder, nobody could be captured. I wonder why police becomes so much efficient about the capturing those involved in killing of their colleagues, but acts apathetic towards the murder of common men! Does it mean that only the police personnel are human beings commanding proper protection against the hoodlums while general people are second class citizens who are expendable? Does the Police Department want to tell the gangsters that you may kill as many of the civilians as you wish, but don't

you dare touch us?

It is reported that during the robbery in the Pubali Bank, the persons held hostage inside the bank tried to signal the police that something wrong is happening inside the bank, but they paid no attention to them as they were busy taking their daily tolls.

I wonder the hierarchy of the police department really has any intention to transform the police force into "Friends of the common people". After all their salary comes from the tax money of the common people.

TM  
Dhaka

## The Kashmir problem

The Kashmir crisis was solely created through a diplomatic double standard.

In late 40s when the Nizam of Hyderabad refused to join India and wanted to remain independent after the partition of British India into India and Pakistan, India protested on the ground that the majority of Hyderabad subjects were Hindus in faith, and according to the accepted

principle of partition based on populations' religious faith, Hyderabad must have to opt for India. Nizam did not agree and India marched into Hyderabad and freed the people of Hyderabad from Nizam's rule. This is a positive diplomacy showing respects to democracy and understanding agreed upon by the then major political parties of India and British Government in Delhi and therefore Nizam's people did not find any one in UNO supporting them.

Later when the Maharaja of Kashmir, where over ninety five per cent people practice Islamic faith, decided to join India, uprising of his subjects erupted and India at once sent troops to quash the uprising of Kashmir people and later declared "Kashmir as an integral part of India" Pakistan protested and sought help of UNO. UNO according to the norm of democracy and accepted the principle of partition, passed resolution to settle the issue through plebiscite. India did not like this idea and never allowed holding a plebiscite under the supervision of

UNO. As far as I can remember and understand this is the background of Kashmir problem. If any thing I missed or not stated correctly it may kindly be pointed out for my correct understanding and of the readers.

This double standard of diplomacy is the root cause of Kashmir problem -- for people of Hyderabad -- their faith and wish were considered as the deciding factor for action, not the willingness of Nizam. Whereas the Maharaja's willingness was the deciding factor for the action, not the people!

What is the solution now? Very simple, though late, India should now respect the wishes of the Kashmiris for self-determination and act accordingly. However if there is a second way to solve the problem and is agreed upon by three sides, then well and good.

AK Azad, Dhaka