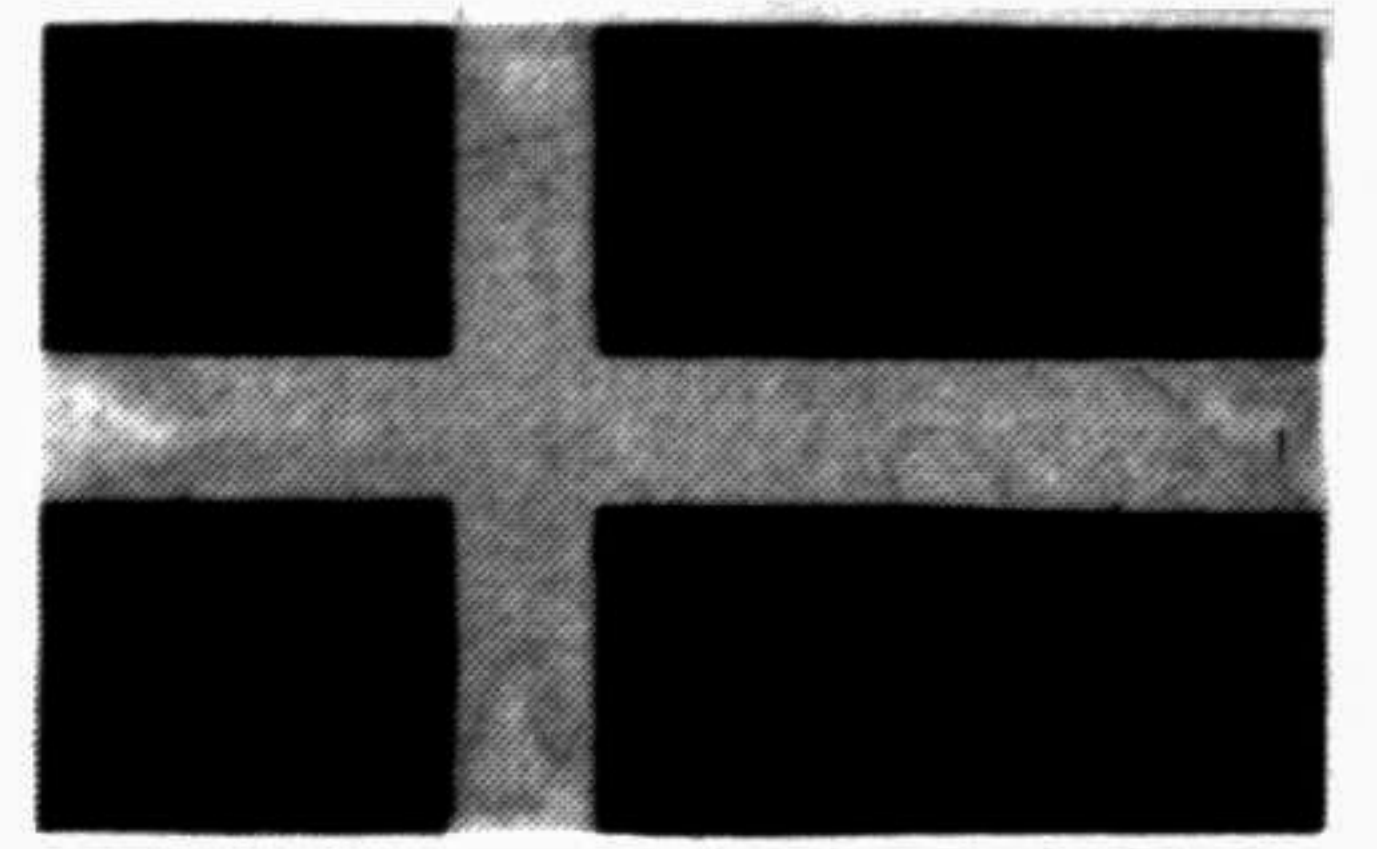




NATIONAL DAY OF SWEDEN



The Daily Star 8

Special Supplement June 6, 1991

A Conversation with Ambassador Cederblad

Partners in Development

Relations between Bangladesh and Sweden began on a firm, friendly footing right from the start. Convergence of views on wide-ranging issues, from non-alignment to human rights, helped the growth of bilateral ties over the past two decades. At the same time Sweden, a country with a strong social-democratic tradition, has proved to be a solid partner in Bangladesh's development efforts. The pattern of assistance has changed over the years, with Bangladesh exporting increasing volumes of goods, particularly garments, while the Stockholm government channels aid directly to areas where it feels the need is most acute — health, education and rural employment.

Not surprisingly Sweden's ambassador in Dhaka is a man with considerable experience in development work, as well as being an economist. On the occasion of Sweden's National Day on June 6, Daily Star Assistant Editor Sabir Mustafa went along for a coffee and a conversation with ambassador Carl Olof Cederblad.

DS: What role do you think Sweden can play in the social and economic development of Bangladesh? Economic aid is obviously one crucial area where you have made an impact, but is there scope for cooperation in other areas?

CO: Well, we are involved in a lot of development cooperation programmes. It started right from the beginning (after Bangladesh gained independence), and at the moment the size of the programme is around 92 crore Taka per year. We have targeted our efforts mainly on rural poor people, especially women, and we have concentrated on three special areas — primary education, health and rural employment. We carry out these programmes through government agencies but also with the help of other donors, and also through local NGOs. We are one of the biggest supporters of the Gramscen Bank.

DS: By that you mean financial backing...

CO: Yes, financial support. These are very necessary parts for a country's development. People need to be healthy, they need employment especially in rural areas, and the country needs to be able to provide education for all.

Then of course we try to work in the area of trade and industry. The trade balance at the moment is very much in favour of Bangladesh. Sweden exports mainly machinery for industries, and nothing of that is financed from the aid budget, it is purely commercial.

DS: Are all imports from Sweden done on a commercial basis?

CO: Yes, all commercial. We have no what they call "import support" component in our aid programme. We had that before but we found that it was more useful and appropriate to concentrate on the three areas I mentioned earlier.

Then of course, we have some cooperation in the industrial sector like joint ventures



Cederblad: Optimistic

such as Dhaka Match, IABB in Chittagong etc. Just a few days back I was at the opening of a (joint venture) company called Vac Pac Services Bangladesh Ltd, and they specialise in vacuum packaging of garment products. That's a new thing and I think it's an example of how a small industry, using high-technology such as machines to do vacuum packaging, can find profit in an area that is essential for Bangladesh. Packaging in plastic means Bangladeshi garments for exports will have lower volume, saving shipping costs, and also keep the product cleaner.

I think in the long-run Bangladesh will have to produce all the things it is importing for the garments industry. I mean, quality fabrics can be easily made in Bangladesh. And I think it will come. Garments is really the first broad industrialisation process in this country, in that you employ a lot of people, especially women, and you train a lot of people in management and export handling, which is very useful. You also have the jute industry which is very old, but it is very difficult to see a bright future for it at present.

DS: The number of Bangladeshi students studying in Sweden is probably not very high, although we do come across one every now and then. Is there much interaction between the two education ministries? Is there much scope for things like student exchanges?

CO: Not very much, I must say. There are several hundred Bangladeshis in Sweden but many of them are political refugees. There are some among them that went to Sweden as students, but it is very difficult. You have to stay there at least one year to learn Swedish first. That's absolutely essential. We are a little provincial in that sense, that we don't have enough people for really international universities. There are some courses, of course, that are taught in English but most are in Swedish.

DS: As you said, your development activities centre around health and education. Now, do you run your own projects or do you finance projects run by others?

CO: We finance projects, and a fairly large number of them. We support a lot of women development activities,

human rights activities. Small programmes, but substantial numbers.

DS: Is there any move by the Bangladesh government or the chambers of commerce here to increase business cooperation and joint ventures?

CO: Now, from the Bangladeshi side, they are of course eager to get joint ventures but from the Swedish side it is very difficult to find people who want to come over here. I think at the moment, the interest among Swedish companies is towards the European common market. They want to be inside the common market, and of course now Eastern Europe is also coming up. When Swedish companies do look this way, they look more at South-East Asia, because they have a more developed infrastructure, but it is more difficult here.

DS: But given all the difficulties, would you say we are doing well in so far as joint ventures are concerned?

CO: Well, I wouldn't say you are doing well because this Dhaka Match is a disaster. It's difficult to say why it isn't operative. It has a tough trade union, and the management seems quite unable to overcome its problems and it's making losses, and losses and losses. And of course, the end result may be that Swedish Match will leave it. So that is not a good success story.

I think the little electronics factory in Chittagong Export Processing Zone is a success story. They are making good money. This is partly because of the facilities at CEPZ, and also because of good management. But foreign investors do face problems here, with trade unions, with difficult legal procedures etc. And then there is the problem with Bangladesh's image abroad as a disaster-prone country, which does not help business prospects.

But on the other hand, I am optimistic about Bangladesh. I think there will be better business here. May be it will come more from Japan, China, Korea, who are closer to your markets and so on, that's the way it will start before you have Americans and Europeans. You can see the trend already at the CEPZ where there are a lot of Japanese and Korean firms.

DS: Is there any political cooperation between Sweden and Bangladesh, say at the United Nations or other international forums?

CO: Yes, you could say that we have very much the same views when we face issues in the sphere of the United Nations. We have very often supported the least developed countries, and Bangladesh plays a great role. By the way, we are going to abolish all quotas and restrictions on textiles import into Sweden from July 1 of this year. We have always been at forefront of the demand to have all multi-fibre agreements abolished. But we had already abolished quotas for Bangladesh, because of its LDC status.

Sweden is non-aligned; we have close cooperation with all our neighbours and we are going to join the common market. I am a great believer in regional cooperation, and if SAARC could do more than it



The monarchs: Carl Gustaf XVI with queen Silvia

Balance of Trade
(value in million Swedish kroner;
exchange: kroner 10 million=Taka 6.6 crore)

	1985	1988	1990
Export to Bangladesh	118	63	22
Import from Bangladesh	38	115	132
Balance	+ 80	- 52	- 110



Sweden's future: Prosperity ensured in a democratic society

is at present, then that would really open an opportunity for increased trade. I mean, it is always easier to trade with your neighbours than with other countries.

DS: Sweden has always been a champion of disarmament, of turning swords into ploughshares, to use a famous phrase. Now, with the end of the Cold War and with all the talk going on about disarmament in the East and West, is Sweden planning to push for a transfer of money from arms and into development?

CO: I think I know what you are aiming at. At the Paris aid consortium meeting, there were discussions about using less money in the Bangladesh budget for defence and more for development. I don't think we had a view on that issue specifically. But our common view is of course to bring military spending down throughout the world.

We are also very worried in Sweden about the environment. We have 11 nuclear power stations there, but the government decided even before the Chernobyl disaster in the Soviet Union to close down those stations. There is simply no safe way to handle nuclear power, not yet anyway. The Chernobyl disaster sent clouds of radio-active dust over Sweden, and that upset the people very much. As I said, the decision to close all nuclear power stations was taken before 1986; but Chernobyl provided another spark.

The Third Estate

Unique Safeguards

The 1980s have been a period marked by growth for the mass media in Sweden. The dailies have continued to develop advanced technology and many have increased their number of editions. Television has undergone a reorganization and new radio channels have been established. The number of film-goers has started to rise. The expansion of new media has continued, home video at the predicted rate, teletext faster than expected and cable television at a slower pace than was predicted. At the end of the 1980s, the question of whether to introduce commercial advertising on television has become topical as a result of a number of Government commissions.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA

Sweden seems to have been the first country in the world to establish freedom of the press. In 1666, Parliament adopted a Freedom of the Press Act as a part of the Constitution. More recently, similar legislation has been passed for radio and television without becoming Constitutional Law.

After the promulgation of the first Press Act, the last decades of the 18th century witnessed a relapse into repression and censorship, but since the constitutional reform of 1809, freedom of the press has prevailed. The present Freedom of the Press Act dates from 1949, with several subsequent amendments.

As part of the Constitution, this Act is protected by special safeguards. Thus, to gain legal force, any amendment or abro-

gation of the Act must be confirmed by two successive parliaments, with general elections taking place between first and second readings.

Unique safeguards

In Sweden, as in some other democracies, public censorship of the press as well as other serious restrictions on publishing and distribution of printed matter are explicitly forbidden. However, the Swedish lawmakers set out to safeguard press freedom by an elaborate combination of measures.

Foremost among these is the institution of the responsible publisher. Any periodical appearing four times a year or more must appoint a responsible publisher, who alone is answerable for the contents of the publication. He alone can be held accountable for any violation of the Freedom of the Press Act.

The responsible publisher is appointed by the owner of the publication. He must be a resident of Sweden (an amendment, effective as of 1978, extended eligibility to foreign nationals domiciled in Sweden), and neither a minor nor an undischarged bankrupt.

Sources protected

With the introduction of a publisher with sole responsibility, the lawmakers have deliberately created a scapegoat for all violations of the Freedom of the Press Act. By providing a person who—with his chain of substitutes—can always be held responsible for any transgression, they have quite intentionally exonerated the actual culprit. In fact, the law explicitly prohibits the investigation or disclosure of newspapermen's sources. It follows that a person who contributes to a newspaper as a reporter or informant is not only protected against legal action, being unassailable, but his identity becomes immaterial and thus in admissible as a point of law.

It should be noted that this protection is extended even to State and municipal employees, who are thus free to give information to newspapers and other media without fear of legal repercussions or extra-legal pressures and intimidation.

The rationale for such extreme protection of media sources is that the mass media—the "Third Estate"—need the fullest possible insight into the operations of society and thus should have the conduct of the other two estates—Parliament and Government—under surveillance.

That the impunity of informants might induce some of them to "leak" irresponsible, harmful or even untruthful statements to the media is not considered too damaging. The law may protect the informant

but does not exonerate the crime.

Access to public documents

Another remarkable feature of the Swedish Freedom of the Press Act is the principle of free access to public documents. This, too, is an expression of the lawmakers' intent to support the media in the role of public watchdog.

The principle that every Sweden citizen should have access to virtually all documents kept by State or municipal agencies was introduced as early as 1766 in the first Freedom of the Press Act. It was unique then and has been adopted by few other countries even today.

The principle gives anyone — actually even aliens — the right to turn to a State or municipal agency and ask to be shown any document kept in their files, regardless of whether the document concerns him personally or not. Officials are legally required to comply and even to supply copies of the document requested, if this is feasible.

This right is of great importance to any one concerned by any proceedings, lawsuits and the like involving public agencies. But it is equally essential to journalists seeking information about what is going on behind the walls of officialdom. Their search for the facts is clearly facilitated by the right of Swedish officials to give oral information concerning their activities.

The right of access is jealously guarded, not only by the media themselves, but also by the Parliamentary Ombudsman (JO). Traditionally, the JO has considered it one of his major duties to supervise the implementation and enforcement of this right.

The Press Council and the Press Ombudsman

For many decades, Swedish press organizations have been intent on guarding against abuse of the liberties guaranteed by the Constitution. As early as 1916, the Swedish Press Council—the first of its kind in the world—was set up by the Publicists' Club (the national press club), the Swedish Newspaper Publishers' Association and the Swedish Union of Journalists. A journalistic Code of Ethics was first adopted in 1923 by the Publicists' Club. After several amendments, the present Code was adopted in 1978 and has been acceded to by journalists, publishers and the broadcasting companies.

The Code aims at upholding high ethical standards in general and, especially, at protecting the integrity of individuals against invasion of privacy, defamation and other damaging publicity. A special section is devoted to combating editorial advertising and other undue outside influences calculated to mislead the readers. A special committee watches over this type of malpractice.

In 1969, the official of Press Ombudsman (PO) was established to supervise the adherence to ethical standards. Public complaints are to be directed to the PO, who is also entitled to act on his own initiative. He may dismiss a complaint if unfounded, or if the newspaper agrees to publish a retraction or rectification acceptable to the complainant. In clear-cut cases of minor importance, the PO may issue ex-officio criticism of the newspaper.

When the PO finds that the grievance is of a more serious nature, he will file a complaint with the Press Council, which will then publish a statement acquitting or censuring the newspaper. The findings of the Council are published in the newspaper concerned and in the business papers of the press. In addition to publishing a censoring opinion, the offending newspaper also has to pay a fine.

The Council is composed of six members, two of whom represent the general public while three are appointed by the press organizations and the sixth is the chairman who holds a casting-vote. The latter has always been a member of the Supreme Court.

The State and the System

WITH an area of 174,000 sq. miles (450,000 km), Sweden is the fourth-largest country in Europe. Half its land surface is covered with forest. Less than 10% is farmland. Lakes dot the countryside, which is relatively flat. A long mountain chain in the northwest reaches heights of up to 6,946ft (2,114m).

Sweden has a population of 8.5 million, with over 85% living in the southern half of the country. Swedish is a Germanic language. Around 95% of the population belongs to the Lutheran State Church.

Like other industrialized countries, Sweden has a low birth rate which rose somewhat in the 1980s. Life expectancy is high — about 74 years for men and 80 for women.

Sweden is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary form of government. The King, since 1973 Carl XVI Gustaf, has only ceremonial functions as Head of State. Parliament consists of one chamber, whose members are directly elected by proportional representation for three-year terms. Sweden

has had universal suffrage since 1921 and the voting age is 18.

The social democratic party held power alone or in coalitions from 1932 until the 1976 election when the non-socialist parties—Center, Liberal and Moderate (conservative)—won a majority and formed a coalition cabinet. After six years of non-socialist rule the Social Democrats returned to power again in 1982. They remained in office after the 1988 election, when they gained 156 of the 349 parliamentary seats.

The Parliamentary Ombudsmen investigate suspected abuses of authority by civil servants. Other Ombudsmen protect the public by keeping a watchful eye on business practices, consumer rights, ethnic and sex discrimination, and press ethics. Most government documents are open to inspection by the public and press at any time.

Sweden's foreign policy is best described as "non-participation in alliances in peacetime aiming at neutrality in the event of war". The neutrality policy is seen as necessitating a strong de-

fense system. This is based on general male conscription, with a defense budget totaling some 3% of GDP.

Sweden takes an active part in international negotiation efforts in the disarmament field. Strong support for the work of the UN is one of the cornerstones of Swedish foreign policy.

Beside being a member of the UN and its specialized agencies, Sweden is a member of the OECD, EFTA and the Council of Europe. It has a free-trade agreement with the EC covering industrial products. One of the most important foreign policy issues of the 1990s is future cooperation with the EC and how far Sweden's alignment with the EC can go without compromising its neutrality.

Far-reaching practical cooperation exists between the Nordic countries in social welfare and cultural affairs and a joint labor market has been established. There is a high degree of uniformity in the legislation of the five Nordic countries.

Sweden appropriates 1% of its GNI on international development assistance.



Sculpture garden near Stockholm: Unique art of Carl Milles (1875-1955)