

Refloating BCCI

There will be relief among a cross section of people here, especially in financial and banking circles, that the stage is set for refloating the Bangladesh branches of the defunct Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) under a new name and with a reorganised capital structure and equity participation from the government as well as private financial institutions.

In taking this decision, the authorities here have followed the example set by several other developing countries, the latest case being that of Pakistan, where BCCI operation had suffered the same fate as it did in Bangladesh in July last year. The long delay of ten months in working out a plan for salvaging the bank caused great hardship to BCCI depositors and account holders, which was only partly relieved by some welcome measures of the central bank to provide advances to depositors through the Agrani Bank and other steps.

There are many lessons to be learnt from the dismal and what one may say, the sordid BCCI saga, at both international and national levels. In the process, we must admit that while the top management of BCCI indulged in outright criminal activities, the Bank of England and several other central banks failed in their own responsibility in monitoring what was going on in BCCI's various branches, at different levels, especially from the mid-eighties. It is, therefore, important that all the central banks in countries where this organisation had been in operation, including Bangladesh, make a thorough evaluation of their own lapses, of their own acts of omissions and commissions, which had allowed the ill-fated BCCI to conceal what we now regard as illegal activities behind almost audacious public relations exercises, from making "useful" high-level appointments to befriending presidents and prime ministers in developing countries, including — we are sorry to say — Bangladesh.

In the case of this country, such an evaluation may be particularly important in the light of the pressing need for overall reforms in the banking sector. A recent report published by this paper had focussed on several problems, such as the burden of bad debts and undercapitalisation, facing the country's financial institutions. The trading circles may well say that the entire banking sector is in a state of stagnation, if not in a crisis. It is obvious to all, most certainly to the Finance Ministry, that privatisation cannot gain the necessary momentum unless the banks, nationalised as well as the private ones, reflect a new sense of purpose and dynamism, prompted by new guidelines from relevant authorities. Here, we have passed the stage of making policy declarations couched in impressive rhetoric. With the stage set for refloating the BCCI operation, the time is now for action that revitalises the entire banking sector.

'It Takes Life to Love Life'

Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley is many in ways more than being merely masculine — tall and fair and never giving up. At sixty-seven, at the peak of his political power and popularity, he has suddenly decided to step down and hand over affairs of the state to life-long aide Patterson. The reason he has given for that is certain to add to the glories of an active dutiful man. He is not keeping fit, he says, and a bout with pneumonia in 1990 has gradually been restricting him to an 8-hour working day. This he is not ready to accept as he is convinced anyone in his position should work 16 hours a day. This is certainly new as a reason for resigning from such high office. Many before Manley had as long a working day as he — starting from Alexander to Napoleon to Aurangzeb — the special breed among homo sapiens we now call workaholics. Alexander died at less than half of Manley's present age. Counting out his two exiles, Napoleon took two furloughs from work — one that was imposed on him by Nelson forcing the former to become an Egyptian, and a Muslim to boot, and the other that allowed himself in deference to his late-in-life first-found true love with Polish teenage charmer Marie Walewska — the resulting dalliance leading inevitably to his rout in Austerlitz. Aurangzeb, we feel, simply didn't have the choice to retire or fight less. He couldn't have handed Hindustan over to anyone specially when it was in such a horrible mess that he and the Marathas could manage to reduce into between them.

What, however, Manley hasn't said, but is nevertheless widely believed, is he is going to be married soon after his self-imposed retirement. Not quite in the King Edward VIII fashion — true. And, may be, not very far from it either. Shall not we call it a very manly deed indeed?

Whatever may be said about Manley's resignation, it is clear that power hasn't corrupted him. All his life he has served his small nation — in and out of power. Is he also abandoning that all to worship and glorify love in the form of a woman? Perhaps it is Emily Dickinson who had said, "It takes life to love life". Is Manley's decision a bright vindication of that?

PHILIPPINES PRESIDENTIAL POLLS

No Scenario Leaves Imelda Much of a Chance

by A S M Nurunnabi

"When poor men have been induced to forget what rich have wrought, even an accused thief may sneak in. At this stage of the race, in other words, almost anything is possible."

PHILIPPINES' May 11 election is commonly billed as the first free and fair presidential contest the republic has known since 1960. Unlike the 1986 vote, the contest lacks both melodrama and star quality. Most people saw Corason Aquino's showdown with the Marcoses as a holy war pitting the very incarnation of goodness against a world-class villain and his evil queen. By contrast, the current race is shaping up as a free-for-all among eight mere mortals whose clearest goal is only to win. One thing in their favour is that the voters now want a stronger leader than the housewife who failed to make use of the greatness that had been thrust upon her.

With the presidential election a little more than a month away, Imelda Marcos has the potentiality of wreaking maximum political havoc, although she coyly assured her crowds of supporters initially that she had no political agenda.

Soon, however, there were indications that she was going to be a political force. Opposition candidates started mauling one another to win her blessings.

Imelda filed her presidential candidacy on the 21st

January last. What had prompted the former First Lady to seek the Presidency? Since returning from exile last November, she had been egged on by cheering crowds mobilized by her own supporters. The admiring throngs gave her the impression that she stands a good chance to be president. Most importantly she believed that winning the election could allow her to escape the government bid to prosecute her on corruption and embezzlement charges.

Reaction from the Filipino media to Imelda's announcement had been hostile. Her detractors take comfort in the fact that both her status and electoral environment have changed during the past six years. Unfettered and critical media have replaced the "crony press" that spoke no evil of her for a decade. She is no longer the wife of an all-powerful president, but a mere citizen.

A spokesman for President Aquino had earlier dismissed speculation that she might be

forced to seek re-election in a "war of widows" contest. She later confirmed her decision to step down and endorsed presidential candidacy of former Defence Secretary. Fidel Ramos, who saved her from six coup attempts. Why was the President endorsing a soldier to succeed her? Because the retired general had been "reserved by God for the eleventh hour" to help restore and preserve democracy, she said.

President Corason Aquino had taken due notice of the decision of Imelda Marcos to enter the presidential race. Few would rate the chances of the former First Lady, now out on bail, as even reasonable. But with all the money she can pump into the campaign, she can divide votes in the confused field of as many as eight contenders.

Besides Imelda, whose excesses are the stuff of legend, the other contenders are: (i) Cojuangco, who labours under the cloud of having been Ferdinand Marcos' leading

"crony capitalist," (ii) Career officer Ramos — his loyalty to civilian rule is still questioned, though he helped ignite Manila's "people power" revolt and Aquino's most crucial ally, (iii) Mitra, the influential Speaker who is struggling to live down his reputation as a wire pulling traditional politician and Cojuangco buddy. Despite Mitra's failure to win the President's endorsement, he continues to control the dominant L D P Party, the country's best-oiled political machine. He commands the support of a majority of pro-Aquino Congressmen, which makes him a formidable contender; (iv) Jovito Salonga, with solid credentials, still commands wide respect, but weighed down by dwindling sources of campaign funds; (v) Vice-President Laurel; (vi) Jovial movie star Joseph Estrada; and (vii) Former Immigration Commissioner Miriam Defensor Santiago.

Curiously, Ramos and Mitra, both nominally pro-Aquino, have spent more time attack-

ing each other than their main foe, Cojuangco, who stands to gain most from a split in the liberal left vote.

No scenario leaves Imelda much of a chance, but as Time magazine interestingly commented, "when poor men have been induced to forget what rich have wrought, even an accused thief may sneak in. At this stage of the race, in other words, almost anything is possible."

Although President Aquino restored democracy, her administration has done little to place the country on a stable economic footing. A country once regarded as the most promising in Southeast Asia remains largely sunk in hand-to-mouth destitution six years after the uprising that catapulted her into power. A host of natural disasters had strained the country's resources. A huge gap between rich and poor has persisted since Spanish colonial days.

No government could narrow it appreciably. The country has a runaway

population growth of 2.9% a year and is saddled with \$ 29 billion in foreign debt. The Senate's mandated closure of US-run Subic Bay and sister American military installations has threatened to cost the country 42,000 well-paid jobs. On the other hand, 1.35 million jobs must be created annually to keep pace with the swelling labour force. Aquino's half-hearted attempts at agrarian reform has stalled, and in most of the cases, foreign investment is at a stand still. The bureaucracy and law enforcing agencies remain riddled with corruption.

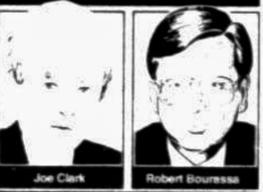
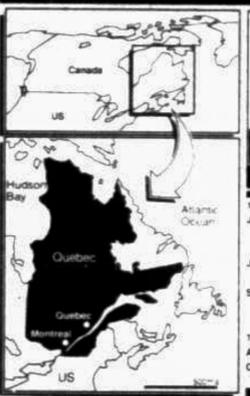
But according to most experts, slowly and surely, the economy will begin perking up in course of 1992. The fiscal managers are credited with having won their biggest battle, which was to avert a runaway inflation. The IMF review team, noting the successful measures against inflation, and the gradual improvement of trade balance, praised the government's performance for its "pragmatism and flexibility". The stabilization programme is expected to succeed if the administration that will come after Corason Aquino's does not fail to forge necessary economic reforms.

Canada is Facing the Hour of Decision

Clyde Sanger writes from Ottawa

Crucial talks over the future of Canada take place this summer. The starting point is a parliamentary committee report just published that recognises Quebec as a "distinct society" with its own language and law and offers it control over cultural affairs. Six million, mainly French-speaking, people of Quebec have been demanding separation from Canada. If that were to come, many fear the US might swallow the smaller Atlantic provinces of Canada.

Quebec



1981 Jan. After 18-year minority in 1980, 22 provinces from Ontario government's proposal to Quebec, Liberal gov't policy. June. Quebec's first provincial election, 1980, after 10 years of 100,000 people. Sept. 1981. 20.7% proposal for 28 changes and Senate's Committee starts giving public reaction. 1982 April. Federal government's definitive proposal, but Premier Bourassa has to hold referendum in Quebec.

with powers held by the provinces being offset by federal powers.

In 1867 a balance was struck that gave the provinces wide powers. They control the sectors of health and education (there is no national university, as there is in Australia), and also natural resources including forestry and mining.

But other subjects have become important, about which the Fathers of Confederation never dreamed: for example, the environment and broadcasting.

Cultural subjects became important for Quebec, when its leaders saw the French language under threat from the dominant Englishness of North America.

As well, after income tax was introduced, the federal government acquired more weight through its spending power. Last year, notes the Beaudoin-Dobbie Report, about 35 per cent of federal spend-

ing has been in areas of provincial jurisdiction.

Other provinces besides Quebec have resented the way Ottawa can change their programmes or priorities by dangling its gold in a different direction.

So, how to strike a modern balance between Ottawa and the present 10 provinces? Pierre Trudeau made two major attempts as prime minister.

In 1971 Quebec premier Robert Bourassa first accepted the "Victoria Charter," but then revoked his agreement when he got home and some cabinet ministers told him he had not own enough new powers.

In 1982 Trudeau pushed through a Constitution Act, creating a Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and amending the 1867 Act in other ways.

Unfortunately, Rene Levesque, then Quebec premier, was not involved in

the final stages of complex talks and refused to sign the agreement.

When Brian Mulroney, a Quebecer like Trudeau, became prime minister in 1984, he set out to "bring Quebec into the constitutional family."

But his Meech Lake Accord failed in 1990 for several reasons: the deal had been hatched in secret by the premiers; it had ignored Canada's aboriginal people; and western Canadians also wanted reforms.

This was a turning point in Quebec, especially in the elite circles that set opinion in the province. They were convinced the rest of Canada had rejected them. Quebec's television stations replayed many times a scene of some bigots in a small Ontario town stamping on the fleur-de-lys flag of Quebec.

The ruling Liberal Party in Quebec produced in January 1991 a study titled A Quebec Free to Choose, calling for the transfer from Ottawa of power in 22 fields, including foreign policy and native affairs.

This Allaire Report would emasculate the federal government, but Premier Bourassa's chief lieutenant, Gilles Remillard, is still calling it "the point of reference" for his government.

From Ottawa's viewpoint, the Beaudoin-Dobbie report is the realistic point of reference. It offers Quebec (and other provinces, if they want it) an impressive list of extra powers, in particular control over cultural affairs.

And it firmly grasps the nettle that has stung earlier negotiators when it says Quebec is obviously a "distinct society" and has to have powers to protect that distinctness in language and law.

But the report has had to deal with other pressure

from Alberta, where the Reform Party leads the polls and pushes the line of no special concessions to Quebec.

His opposite number is Robert Bourassa, who is also in a tight corner. He is tethered to the Allaire list of demands, and knows that many of his Liberals are separatists while he remains — at least for now — a federalist.

He also has to face the scorn of Jacques Parizeau, the separatist leader of the Parti Quebecois, who dismisses the federal moves as "buffoonery." The PQ opposition currently leads Bourassa's Liberals in the polls. And Bourassa is committed to holding a referendum on the sovereignty issue in October.

In July Ottawa is putting on a lively 125th birthday party, and Queen Elizabeth is coming — but not crossing the Ottawa river to Quebec. The mood is bleaker than the last big party, the centenary in 1967, when she and millions of others went to Expo '67 in Montreal.

Nobody compares Canada to Yugoslavia or the former Soviet Union. But many people are facing seriously the prospect of a break-up and a thought which was unthinkable in the bubbly days of 1967, that Montreal may not be part of Canada much longer.

GEMINI NEWS CLYDE SANGER is a former Director of Information at the Commonwealth Secretariat. A Journalist in Britain, Africa and at the UN, he has lived in Canada since 1967.

OPINION

Why be Apologetic?

Your correspondent, Mr Ziaur Rahman Khan, in his item published in the Opinion column of The Daily Star on the 21st March, appeared apologetic and wished to shy away from being termed "secessionist". Why? Successful secession is no crime in law just as successful coup d'etat itself becomes the source of lawful succession to state power. Failed coup just as unsuccessful secessionist movement may be condemnable.

Historically, it is a fact that there was a secessionist movement in East Bengal or East Pakistan during the period from 1947 to 1971. The documents of the Agartala Conspiracy Case which had been dubbed by Mujib as the Islamabad Conspiracy Case despite ample authentic documentary evidence which many of us took for granted as Mujib's assessments, may not necessarily be taken as the only proof of existence of the movement. There are host of others as well. Another authentic document is the book 'Freedom Movement of Bangladesh—1943 to 1973: Some Involvement', written by one of RAW operatives and a long time close friend of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Jyoti Sen Gupta. He was one of the rare Bengali speaking Indian Central Intelligence Organisation's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) man (working in East Pakistan since early 1950s and died in 1986). Yet another proof is ready in another document, 'Inside RAW' written by Ashok Raina, being himself a senior retired RAW official. These documentary books were published not before 1971 but long after the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War.

On the issue of secession of East Pakistan, in addition to the Pakistani and Indian sources, there are Bangladeshi source documents as well. I

know, at least, of three other proofs. First, during the 1965 India-Pakistan War, the Sheikh had not only refused to condemn India but also insisted on the then East Pakistan Governor Abdul Monem Khan to unilaterally declare independence of East Pakistan right at the moment of the war. I am sure the proof would be available in some old documents at the Bangabhaban. Secondly, Sheikh Mujib's one of the still surviving close friends has confirmed to me that since 1947 Mujib had been involved in the secessionist movement based at Calcutta where on a number of occasions this person, recently turned into a friend of mine, was also present. The Daily Sangbad of Dhaka in its 8th June 1972 issue has yet another proof of Mujib's involvement in the secessionist movement. The issue of the daily quoted Mujib saying clearly the previous day in a public meeting at the then Ramna Race Course (now Suhrawardy Udyan), "I knew well before that the Pakistan Army would torture you all, and you would then take shelter in India, and India would come to your help. Did all these come about without any prior plan? No. I had made all the prior arrangements" ("Ami jantam Pakistan Army tomara sabaht choley karbe, tomara sabaht choley karbe, Dharat amader sahajya karbe; eshab ki amniti hoyechhilo, amni agay thekay sab bandobastgare rekhechhilam").

That Mujib had been a secessionist has been proved beyond doubt. And because the movement had led to our independence from Pakistan, there is nothing to make any apology for it or be shy about, the act.

M T Hussain Mirpur, Dhaka.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Pakistani visa

Sir, we would like to draw the kind attention of the Government of Pakistan, Islamabad as well as the Embassy of Pakistan, Dhaka to its Visa Section which has been irregular in functions in issuing Visas to the Visitors desiring to proceed to Pakistan since September last year.

It had ever been the official formality of Pak Embassy, Dhaka that they at first had an interview with the visitors and then put initial on their passports and asking them to come after one month with PIA tickets for Visa. Putting initial on passport virtually meant granting of Visa. But the present Visa Officer of Pak Embassy, Dhaka is not doing so, as before, and on the contrary they have adopted an attitude of asking the visitors to submit affidavit, sponsorship certificate, passport photocopy and national identity card etc, without prior notice. If the

condition of presenting these documents is actually a fact and connected with the provision of Visa formality, then the authority concerned could put a circular at least on its notice board for general information.

Meanwhile, although the Visa Officer put initials on the passports of visitors coming out successful in interview and asked them to come after one month with PIA ticket, but surprisingly they were refused visas and suddenly asked to produce the above mentioned documents without any reason. The number of such frustrated and disappointed visa seekers can well be 500. They face a great trouble as they purchased high priced PIA tickets as per direction of the Pak Embassy.

Even on receipt of the documents as mentioned above the concerned Visa Officer did not issue visa forthwith but ask them to come again after 2/3 months. After 2/3 months when the poor visitors rush to

the section, the authorities concerned turn deaf ear to the issue adopting a dilly-dallying policy which, of course, is a matter of great regret and certainly not in the rules and regulations of Visa.

It may be mentioned here that during the period of General Ziaul Haq, erstwhile President of Pakistan, it was easy for Bangladeshi nationals to obtain Pakistani visa.

One more point of disgust — asking only PIA ticket from the visitors, before granting them visa is an autocratic attitude depriving others. Why not Biman or other airlines ticket?

M Z Azam and Wajid Ali Segunbagan, Pahartall, Chittagong.

Golam Azam

Sir, Prof Golam Azam is now talk of the town. A Gono Adalat (people's court) has recently passed verdict to the effect that Mr Azam's crimes during the war of liberation deserve capital punishment. On the other hand, the government is working out legal methodology to deal with the case of Prof Golam Azam.

Apart from the sentimental aspects, Prof Golam Azam's case is a legal riddle. Who has actually given the permission

to Mr Azam to enter and stay in Bangladesh when he is not a citizen of this country? First of all, the person(s) responsible for granting 'illegal' permission allowing Prof Azam to stay in Bangladesh despite controversy, should be asked. Prof Azam is claiming that he never lost the Bangladeshi citizenship. Well, if it is true, does he possess the Bangladeshi passport?

Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh is claiming that the present government made a commitment to grant citizenship to Prof Golam Azam within a political pact. I don't believe that the government could enter into such an agreement without considering the legal complications concerning Mr Azam's citizenship issue.

One question, what would have happened, had Prof Golam Azam supported the other side?

In my opinion, this case needs legal treatment. I think, the verdict of the Gono Adalat together with the government's contentions should be referred to a committee of learned Judges from both the sides to find out legal solutions to Prof Golam Azam case.

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