

## Need for a Heart-surgery Hospital

Highly complicated and costly, open heart surgery is — more often than not — the only remedy for a variety of cardiovascular diseases. The number of patients suffering from such diseases in the country is evidently on the increase. But the sad reality is that the country still has no facilities for heart surgery. Statistics of such patients seeking cure from hospitals abroad are not available, but their growing number at this stage should point to the fact that we ought to have at least one full-fledged heart-surgery hospital in the country.

Patients making continuous foreign trips for heart surgery have to face a number of disadvantages and even risks — both economic and physical. As for the country itself, the cumulative expenses over a long period of time prove too staggering to be desirable on any count whatsoever. Compared to this, the arguments in favour of a hospital for exclusive treatment of heart diseases appear to be logical and timely, because that seeks to build up a permanent facility locally. Calcutta has already shown the way that such indigenous facilities stand a good chance of success.

According to knowledgeable sources, one man took the initiative to pull necessary resources and expertise for establishing a heart-surgery hospital in Dhaka. But his appeal to the government, private entrepreneurs and philanthropic organisations fell on deaf ears. Now another attempt is underway to make possible the building up of a heart treatment facility of international standard. Let us hope this time things will be put in right perspective and the dream of a most advanced heart research centre, and for that matter a centre for all types of heart ailments, will be translated into reality.

Of the several plus points of a heart treatment facility, the most outstanding one is that the centre promises to be highly economically viable. The chances of bringing down the cost of heart operation are, according to an expert in this field, Dr Tapas Raychaudhury of Woodlands Nursing Home, Calcutta, are so real that any future heart-surgery hospital is likely to have a definite edge over similar facilities in other countries, specially in Asia. If this fact is taken into serious consideration, there is no reason why we should not give a real go to such a project. In view of the government policy for the tax waiver on the import of scientific, teaching and medical appliances, the cost of the operations requiring imported equipment is certainly going to be substantially reduced. But then the indigenous medical skills will prove to be an added asset.

Considering all these points, one can see that private entrepreneurs have today enough reasons to be interested in such a programme. Moreover, they have more money for investment now than they ever had in the past for similar ventures. Collective efforts among a few of them can surely pull the required money amounting to Tk 10 to 15 crore for the proposed hospital. Commercially run, this hospital — because of its competitive edge over other such hospitals in neighbouring countries — indeed holds too much promise to be overlooked. The provision for equity shares by the government agencies and insurance companies in the venture, as suggested by Dr Raychaudhury, is also welcome. Because, this will provide the balancing factor between the market economy and public service, specially for the poorer people.

## Indo-Pakistan Dialogue

Any move that helps to lower, if not remove, the tension between India and Pakistan is more than welcome to all the South Asian countries, especially Bangladesh. Hence, we are particularly pleased that several leading politicians of the two neighbours just met in Islamabad in what is described as the second round of non-governmental Indo-Pakistan dialogue and issued a statement calling for "constructive and purposeful" talks between their governments on all matters facing the two countries.

It is somewhat unlikely that the declaration, signed by such prominent personalities as Khan Abdul Wali Khan of Pakistan National Awami Party and former Indian Foreign Minister I K Gujral would produce immediate impact on the policy-makers in Islamabad and New Delhi. In fact, there may be quite a few in the two governments who might treat the declaration with the usual bureaucratic indifference, as one issued by idealistic do-gooders. At the international level, similar statements issued by a loose association of former politicians like Willy Brandt of Germany, Ted Heath of Britain and the ex-president of the United States, Jimmy Carter, create no more than minor waves.

However, on our part, we welcome these moves, especially those relating to the Indo-Pakistan relations. We believe in their validity, because we believe in creating and strengthening public opinion in favour of peace and co-operation not only between Islamabad and New Delhi but also among other capitals, including, needless to say, between Dhaka and New Delhi.

In fact, we would like to see the scope of such a dialogue being broadened. Together with politicians who may not be in power now, these discussions should involve parliamentarians, both moderates and hardliners, of ruling parties as well as of opposition groupings. Ideally, such meetings should provide for totally frank exchange of ideas between the opposite sides, which would call for minimum publicity, or perhaps none at all. The hope is, once these parliamentarians see for themselves the way out of the present distrust that mars the relations between the two countries, they would find opportunities for influencing policies of their administrations, through their own work as parliamentarians. We believe, they are fully capable of performing such a role at this crucial time in South Asia.

# Muslim Economic Community is Beginning to Emerge

Mohammed Aslam writes from Dubai

WHEN a local newspaper editorially welcomed a tentative decision by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey to include three Central Asian republics in their Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) it suggested that, due to the Muslim states natural affinity, the group might in time expand to include Arab Gulf states as well.

A senior Western diplomat called up the paper. He wanted to know, discreetly of course, whether the comment reflected official Gulf thinking or just its own views.

The query underscored Western concern over political realignments in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and freedom for six Muslim-dominated Central Asian republics.

In mid-February the leaders of the three ECO members met in Tehran and formally admitted Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to the fold.

The summit threw open the door to the three others — Kazakhstan, Kirghistan and Tajikistan, which also sent top-level delegations to the meeting.

Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani, opening the summit, said it "is like a family reunion." Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said a political settlement in Afghanistan could lead to its inclusion, too, adding that "such an expansion would further strengthen our organisation, making it a natural geographical ... economic and cultural zone."

Ahead of the summit, Rafsanjani told reporters ECO members and other Muslim

Turkey, Iran and Pakistan have been trying to build closer ties with the ex-Soviet republics. At a summit in Tehran, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan joined their Economic Cooperation Organisation. But the new republics face the dilemma of choosing between radical Tehran and pro-Western Ankara. And the West is getting apprehensive of an Islamic economic bloc.

states of south west Asia "can form a powerful political-economic body in the region and present themselves as a world power."

The West's unease over such statements is not difficult to discern in an environment where anxieties about a potentially nuclear-powered Islamic bloc have grown.

It was probably left to the Turkish President to speak the reassuring words Turgut Ozal

injected his country's secularist and pro-West political and economic orientation into the Tehran summit.

He stressed the need for religious moderation, and said: "All our countries now believe in the advantages of the free market economy. Now the people in the Muslim republics are free to speak their mind and exercise their religion."

This gives us a better chance to ... prove to the world

that Islam stands for peace, respect for humankind and harmony among different faiths.

The contrast between Iranian radicalism and Turkish tolerance was stark. It presents a dilemma for the Central Asian republics seeking a closer relationship with their Muslim neighbours to the south on the basis mutual trust and benefit.

Since they embarked on their independence course after the failed coup against Mikhail Gorbachev last August, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey have been trying to improve ties with them. The drive gathered momentum with the formation of the loose Commonwealth of Independent States as a successor to the USSR.

Turkey has made more concrete moves than the other two states, signing an agreement on Black Sea economic cooperation with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia and Ukraine at a meeting in Istanbul in early February.

The inclusion of non-Muslim but ex-communist states into a formal pact shows Turkey's desire to forge a wide relationship so as to retain its secular and West-oriented outlook. But in the context of a Muslim bloc, too, Turkey has closer cultural and ethnic links with the republics than to

either Iran or Pakistan.

In competing with Iran in political terms, Turkey has the edge. The Central Asian republics prefer a tolerant, almost pro-secular philosophy to religious radicalism. This is not just because of their immediate need to seek broad-based economic and commercial contacts along the line of the Western free market concept.

The Turkish model may find greater acceptance than Iranian-style fundamentalism, although Tehran is also taking a more pragmatic economic approach in seeking accommodation with Western technology and investment.

Perhaps more importantly, the Turkish option also carries the inherent support of the Western world in general and the United States in particular. On the eve of the Tehran summit, US Secretary of State James Baker toured Central Asia.

A spate of recent developments has fuelled Western fears about the nuclear dimension: Pakistan's admission that it has the capability to assemble nuclear arms; Kazakhstan's stand that it has no intention of transferring its nuclear arsenal to Russia and will destroy the weapons itself; and rumours of attempts to recruit former Soviet nuclear scientists.

As to whether the expanded ECO can develop an effective mechanism for economic integration, the goal of a common market seems far too ambitious in view of the group's past record. Many believe the organisation's main achievement so far has been to stay in existence for 27 years.

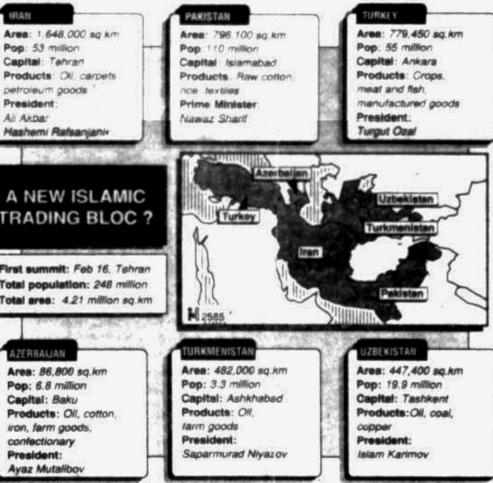
Iran, Pakistan and Turkey were also partners in the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) devoted to economic cooperation, but it never achieved practical results. Similarly, the ECO has remained largely a theoretical bandwagon of unified action.

There is no dearth of planning, targets and proposals. In a pre-summit meeting in Ankara the three original members agreed on a 10 per cent mutual tariff cut on listed goods — that is, 10 per cent below the most-favoured-nation level — and pledged to work towards further reductions.

Work would continue to establish three joint ventures first proposed in 1977, an investment and development bank and a shipping firm. Priority would be given to projects aimed at integrating rail, road and telecommunications links within the ECO.

Inclusion of the Central Asian republics may reintegrate the organisation. Subtle competition for leadership between Iran and Turkey, and Pakistani anxiety to resolve the Afghanistan imbroglio so as to play a greater part in regional diplomacy are likely to give a new impetus to ECO programmes. — GEMINI NEWS

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# Census Results Puzzle Nepali Demographers

Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu

PRELIMINARY results of the national census show Nepal's population growth is not as high as generally projected.

The 1991 census found the population at 18.4 million last June 22, the Himalayan kingdom's census reference day. This represented a decline by 27.9 per cent on projections for 1991 of 19 million.

The census shows that the population increased by merely 3.4 million between 1981 and 1991. This means a decline by a million in the projections.

The census results have significant political implications because Nepal's new democratic Constitution says that the delineation of electoral constituencies for parliamentary elections will be based on the census results.

This means that the results will be used to redraw present parliamentary constituencies that have stood since the 1981 assembly elections held on a non-party basis.

Nepal's first free elections in 32 years were held in early 1991. Under the new Constitution, parliamentary seats

are distributed on the basis of population density to ensure realistic representation.

Some political leaders have been complaining that Nepal's districts in the flatland bordering India are under-represented in the national political process despite their major economic contributions.

Gajendra Narayan Singh, the leader of the Nepal Sadbhavana Party which claims to represent the sentiments of the people in the southern flatland, said in an interview that the people there are politically discriminated against.

"Despite democracy, the people in the Terai (flatland) feel strongly of being discriminated against. They are under-represented. Democracy has not brought any change for them except that we are free to complain about this," he said.

In the 1991 elections, Mr Singh's party won six seats in the 205-member lower house of parliament. Nepal's Terai includes 20 of its 75 districts with about half the national population.

The census results will be used to redraw parliamentary constituencies as well as generate quality data to help draw the kingdom's next five-year development plan

The Terai shares 15 per cent of the total land area but is both the kingdom's breadbasket and industrial heartland. It has 1.4 million hectares of fertile land, making 57 per cent of Nepal's total arable land.

It produces 1.6 million tons of foodgrains which is 60 per cent of the national food production. It consumes only 1.2 million tons and the rest is sent to 32 food-deficit hill districts.

Government's earlier population projections had shown that the Terai will be home to 51 per cent of the country's population by 1991, 57 per cent by 2001, and 62 per cent in 2011.

If this shift continues over the next 20 years, it will transform Nepal from a nation of people living in the highlands

into a nation concentrated in flat, subtropical and urban areas. And "there is every reason to expect that these rates will increase," a report by anthropologist Melvyn C Goldstein says in the Mountain Research and Development Journal.

The census results thus far have puzzled demographers. Officials admit that the quality of data this year is much better because of the massive mobilisation of school teachers for the census job and were paid lump sum.

In sharp contrast, the census takers in 1981 were mostly unemployed people who were paid on the basis of the number of households they surveyed. So the more households surveyed meant more extra income. The consequence may have been that the number of households and

population went up, officials said.

Deshaunter, a vernacular weekly close to Prime Minister Girtija Prasad Koirala, quoted "highly placed officials" saying that in some districts, the number of voters was higher than the district's entire population.

In Manang district bordering China's Tibet, the population is 5,369 but the voters list, which includes the name of eligible voters above 18 years of age, shows 6,358.

Another interesting finding is that Nepal has more women than men: 9.33 million women against 9.22 million men. This sex ratio, 100 women against 105 men.

The average family size has also declined from 5.8 to 5.5. The number of households is 3.34 million, and of this 250,000 are believed homeless.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) provided US\$2 million for the biggest census ever, involving 25,000 census takers, mostly school teachers. The government is spending US\$5.3 million.

For the first time in Nepal, census takers also collected data on ethnicity, in addition to family size, education and occupation. The idea was to generate quality demographic data to help draw the kingdom's next five-year development plan.

Nepal has been without a development plan since 1989 following the trade dispute with India in March that year.

"We have made improvements in the management of census over the years," said Keshav Raj Sharma, deputy chief of the Central Bureau of Statistics, who coordinated the census. — Depthnews Asia.

## 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.

### Idle thoughts!

Sir, "Perhaps there could not be a kinder 'Eid Greetings' from 'The Daily Star' for its innumerable readers than S M Ali's plea for 'A Bill of Rights in All Democracies' (4.4.92) and his comments on 'Two Pieces of Superb Political Writings' (10.4.92) by no less a charismatic person than President Corazon and former Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze. Human history is no doubt replete with so very many masterpieces but who cares, who takes lesson from them? Yes, indeed they were 'superb political writings' on some of the most urgent contemporary problems, and as such their observations deserve to be repeated, followed and honoured. Their warnings can well be treated as 'writings on the wall' for the whole of mankind, Bangladeshis included!

Because of space problem, I refrain from quoting from your writings but would only ponder: Whom they are intended to? Now, a little digression. Two things have been haunting me for some time. How ill is the nation, or, what has happened to it whose frail woman magician Azra Zabeen had to fight singlehandedly, and with only foot-work, against snatchers to save a woman who was robbed of her purses in broad daylight recently at an exhibition in the city while there were hundreds of male onlookers? Were they eating grasses, "forty feeding like one"? A question has naturally come to my mind could Azra Zabeen, the most admirable heroine of Bangladesh, fought so tactfully and ferociously despite being

seriously injured, if she were clad in traditional 'sari' — no matter Indian or Bangladeshi? Oh, mothers and sisters! why not switch over to shirts and trousers made of hard-faced jeans?

Another matter to ponder: Politically, we can't share the pride of Pakistanis whose scientists have acquired the know-how of making a nuclear bomb, nor, we can have the pride of owning a Nobel Prize winner, since we have yet to get one, but surprisingly we all shared their achievement and joy of conquering the World Cricket Cup! Dhaka wore a festive look on the day of final showdown. "The Daily Star's" headline is still ringing in my ears: "Pakistanis Rule the World."

Postscript: Like music, art, literature and love (whose language is equally understood by lettered and unlettered persons), sports is also universal which defies all other considerations.

Abdul Kader, Purana Paltan, Dhaka

### Cricket: TV coverage

Sir, The World Cup cricket is still fresh in everyone's mind, having captured the attention of millions around the world. One of the greatest successes of this, particularly because of the excellent television coverage, is the re-generation of interest in cricket in Bangladesh. Not only that, the World Cup has succeeded in enlisting a lot of new fans particularly among the children.

To counteract all these good things that have happened in the cricketing world,

we were the other day presented with Bangladesh Television's unique version of coverage of one of the most important matches in the cricketing calendar of this country (the National Final) and the absence altogether of Radio Bangladesh from the scene. BTV's effort to cover a cricket match with one camera must have given the cameraman a pain in the neck and resulted in quite a few vital moments, like someone being out or the ball being hit to the fence, to be left out of the telecast.

It was apparent that the producer and the technical staff had little or no knowledge of the game whatsoever. Often we heard the commentator saying that the fielder was trying to catch the ball but all we could see was the cameraman trying desperately to catch the ball in his camera, most of the time in the opposite direction to where the ball was hit. The editing of the TV coverage of the match was deplorable. Someone watching the game could not make a head or tail of the position of the game, the run rate, the overs remaining etc., which are so vital to the enjoyment of cricket. We suddenly found ourselves at the end of the game being told by the commentator that Chittagong had won the match with 5 balls remaining in the innings without even feeling any tinge of excitement that the last few overs of one day cricket generates.

It is high time that the authorities looked into the matter. It takes expertise and knowledge about the game to reduce a 7-hour match into 1 hour's viewing and the producer would do better next time to take a little advice on how to televise a cricket match. Just adding together an hour of video tape with some noisy crowd scenes repeated at least five times may raise an eyebrow of someone dozing in front of the TV but it will do nothing to enhance the attraction of the game for the

cricket enthusiasts.

Cricket in this country has got a new lease of life. We hope such under-rated coverage will not be repeated by BTV in future as this will jeopardise what has been gained. Radio Bangladesh has also got to take a lot of the blame for their 'rather aloof' attitude towards sports coverage in the country. A frustrated fan

### Bangladesh Biman

Sir, It was heartening to read that Biman has extended its booking office counter to render better service to the passengers. This addition should have been made a long time ago, but it is never too late.

Opening up of a separate section for the domestic passengers will not reduce the crowd at either of the two sections. Domestic as well as international, nor will it bring any semblance of convenience to the ticket buyers, and the unseemly spectacle of passengers crowding and jostling for the attention of the ticketing staff at the counter will simply continue.

What Biman should introduce is the system of issuing numbers at the entry point of the counter and the numbers will be called, one at a time, to the staff at the counter who is free. Rest of the customers will continue to wait at the waiting area till called. I do not think this system is very expensive and Biman can introduce this within a short time.

Another item Biman should immediately introduce is Ticket Printer, which will increase the productivity of the staff manifold, as they will not have to manually write the tickets, which takes up a lot of their time. With computerised booking, manual writing of tickets seems so absurd.

Narme Aligeb Motijheel, Dhaka

## OPINION

### BTV: Is Ghost of Ershad Still There?

The last election held in Bangladesh was acclaimed all over the world as the most impartial and fair one ever held in this country. During the period of the Caretaker Government, the present Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina and the Five Party Alliance leader Rashed Khan Menon were invited by the Bangladesh Television authority to take part in a discussion as to what should be the role of Television under a Democratic Government.

Although they had divergent views on the modality of the administration of an independent Television authority, all of them agreed that Television, being the most powerful of media should be freed from Government control and made a free and responsible independent body to telecast programmes according to the needs and aspiration of the people of a democratic society.

During the autocratic regime of General Ershad, TV used to be ridiculed as the box of Shaheb, Bibi and Golam. Starting from changing clothes to playing golf and saying prayer in different mosques by the mighty General were regularly telecast. We saw the best specimen of Zamdani that was being designed and woven by the Bangladeshi artisans through the kind courtesy of Begum Roushan Ershad and of BTV. Many liked her dress and a few her voice. That most of the Bangladeshi babies are ill-nourished and ill-dressed were disapproved by master Shaad Ershad, again by the kind courtesy of BTV.

There were emergent expectation from the democratically elected present Government. There were high hopes and acceptable wishes to be fulfilled. The present Information Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda made promises about the impartiality and independence of the Bangladesh Television authority.

He also promised with all seriousness and sobriety that the Prime Minister and the

Ministers would be shown on TV screen only when they would be involved in developmental projects so that people could see what the democratically elected Government was doing. The Information Minister's statement was praiseworthy but the real picture runs contrary to his avowed pious policy.

May I, as a conscious citizen of this country, ask the honourable Minister the following questions?

1. The Prime Minister has been shown attending Iftar parties of Army, Navy, Air Force, Guard Regiment, BDR, Police, Ansar and VDP. What kind of developmental works are these and who pay for the cost of Iftar and crew of BTV?

2. Whenever the Prime Minister goes abroad and returns home a retinue of well dressed Ministers, high civil servants and Generals of three Services see her off and welcome her back perhaps ignoring their important office works and assignments. Forces drawn from three services are put on a mechanical drill for the kind inspection of the honourable Prime Minister. I would like to know, is it needed for a democratically elected Prime Minister? How much it costs the Government and what is the value of the lost hours of the bureaucrats who routinely attend such functions?

3. Like Ershad the Prime Minister and the President have also started inviting the orphans of one or two orphanages located in Dhaka city to Iftar parties. This is all very good and noble but telecasting such Iftar Party smacks of cheap popularity and eventually becomes counter productive as there are thousands of orphans scattered all over the country who feel themselves deprived and ignored of such state favour and a sense of discrimination haunts their poor souls.

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