

# Nawaz Sharif to Promote Closer Economic Ties

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif assumed office on 24 October, 1990 heading a coalition government of centre-right parties called "Islami Jamhoori Ittehad." He was previously the Chief Minister of Punjab, the largest and the most powerful province of Pakistan. He became famous as a politician after 1983, during the time of President Ziaul Huq. Prior to his entering in politics he was a well-known industrialist and gained fame as an entrepreneur of vision and courage. He was born in the historic city of Lahore in 1949.

The Pakistani leader spoke to Mahfuz Anam, Executive Editor of The Daily Star, during the latter's visit to Pakistan from 1-7 July.

## Political Decision on Extortion Needed

On Thursday illegal toll collectors went on a spree of bombing, stabbing and a variety of other assaults on innocent people in different areas of the city killing, in the process, two people and injuring 12 others. In the two incidents at Jatra-bari and Kamalapur, it was a clear case of rivalry — so the reports say — between groups of toll collectors. Although no direct score to their credit on the day, they however ended up doing away with the lives of a man and a small girl who unfortunately came within the range of their indiscriminate and senseless attacks and counter-attacks. The way these social parasites wield their arms always poses a threat to the lives of the public. It is not for the first time that such unintentional killing has taken place at the hands of musclemen extorting tolls. Nor there is any guarantee of any one's life not being exposed to such a risk in future. Stray bullets and splinters will continue to put lives in danger so long as the toll collectors are given room in society to operate.

Such killings are however in addition to the direct victims of the toll collectors during extortion or even afterwards. The number of such victims is not even small. An unusually high incidence of extortion is a clear indication that a society beleaguered by such hooliganism has to pay a heavy price on several counts. First, both murder and extortion appear to have received, albeit by default of the legal protection, a sanction. That is a chilling sense of social insecurity. Second, social norms and values — by extension — become a casualty in the process. A fear psychosis sets in motion retarding social mobility and growth. Finally, its negative impacts far outweigh the political dividends some parties reap.

The last is a most crucial point in that it points to a deeper malady in society. No doubt, the saga of musclem and terrorism owes greatly to the absence of a democratic dispensation for a long period in the nation's history. Thugs and hooligans were encouraged and even patronised by the autocratic regimes because they, through their reign of terror, best served the interests of the authorities. The bad blood could not be removed from the social body nor were there any serious attempts or commitments either by the government or other political parties to do so. Rather, the same tradition is maintained to establish and even expand the zone of influence.

This is the hard reality the nation must face. Apart from some ritual denunciations and issuance of warnings by the government, nothing practical is done to get rid of these enemies of a stable and peaceful society. They are sometimes rounded up by the police only to be freed soon. Twice in a week the authority issued stern warnings of ruthlessly dealing with the toll collectors. Earlier stringent laws were passed seeking severer punishment for the offence, but to no avail.

The problem is not with the laws but with the will and means to implement them. There is no reason to believe that the musclemen are stronger than the executive power of the administration. When society at large, barring of course the vested interest groups, wants that this social ill is cured, the failure of the government in doing so cannot be explained away easily. Society's outrage has been too strong to be able to defeat it. But it is the administration that must now live up to people's expectation. It should concentrate on punitive measures as well as steps for rehabilitation of those who would be willing to lead a normal life. Creating more and more employment opportunities can be a right answer — both from the preventive and curative points of view — to the problem. A political decision is what will be needed to do the job.

## A Warning from ADB

A high-level workshop being held in Manila, under the auspices of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), has reiterated the grim warning about consequences of current trends in global warming.

According to the Bank's Vice President Yong Chung, the current trends, if continued, would lead to more frequent and fiercer storms in South Asia, including Bangladesh, the Philippines and southern China. Along with these changes, the affected areas, especially in the delta zone of Bangladesh, the east coast of India, the Maldives and the Pacific islands will face more flooding, the destruction of crops, homes and livestock.

The changes are already visible. For instance, the Philippines is already hit by an average of 20 typhoons and storms every year. Last November, a relatively weak storm triggered floods on the Philippine island of Leyte which killed more than 6,000 people in the affected area.

There are other grim possibilities which have been linked to the trends in global warming. Chung talked about decline in food production in some areas and the incidence of skin cancer in some higher latitude countries such as Australia.

The Manila workshop, attended by representatives of some 50 countries, serves as a good follow-up of the Rio Earth Summit, in the regional context. The deliberation has proved most useful, direct and purposeful. What is important is to provide the countries concerned with a draft plan for fighting the danger. By organising this workshop, the ADB has accepted its responsibility of funding further studies, national and regional, and working out necessary solutions, temporary and permanent. This way, ADB can achieve more practical results than what was gained in Rio. The Bank's effectiveness has never been in doubt. It is time to put this effectiveness to a new test.

Immaculately dressed in traditional Pakistani attire, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif hardly gave the impression that he was facing a severe political crisis in the Sindh province. He was warm, easy and forthright in answering questions that ranged from internal politics of Pakistan to regional and global issues.

Daily Star (DS)— Our Prime Minister Begum Khaleida Zia will be visiting Pakistan in a few weeks. What initiatives will you take to further improve Bangladesh-Pakistan relations?

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (NS)— Bangladesh and Pakistan are close friends, brothers, and we have the best of relations with each other. It will be my endeavour to bring the two nations even closer by enhancing our trade, encouraging joint ventures in the field of industries. It is my wish that we should buy more from Bangladesh whatever it can offer to Pakistan rather than going to other countries for the same commodities. The best is to help Bangladesh by boosting up its trade or exports. Of course Pakistan is in a position to play a positive role in this regard. I have already given instructions to my finance ministry, my economic affairs division and also commerce ministry to have more interaction with Bangladesh.

DS— You were probably the first Pakistani Prime Minister to have categorically stated that the problem of stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh will be solved. Your government is known to have taken some initiatives in this direction. Yet nothing concrete has come about. Do you plan to take any follow-up actions on this issue?

NS— The work is rather slow. It is not up to my own expectations. One reason is that it requires a lot of resources. We are in the process of raising more and more resources for this purpose. Pakistan government is more than willing to provide some additional resources but it is a question of our own limitations also. We are looking for resources from outside. Our ministry has written personal letters to many heads of governments abroad. The Rabita-ul-Islam is also very active in this. We hope that with the co-operation with all concerned, we will be able to raise necessary resources to repatriate or facilitate repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh.

DS— According to the latest arrangements, a batch was supposed to have come to Pakistan during the month of June, that is last month. Do you now have any new time frame?

NS— I will check the latest position.

DS— New economic opportunities have now opened up for Pakistan. There are the new Muslim states of Central Asia where trade and investment opportunities exist. With the Mujahedin victory in Afghanistan another area for Pakistan's economic activity has opened up. As a result there is a feeling that Pakistan's focus might shift to the North and the West at the cost of SAARC. Is there any substance to this view?

NS— No, no. SAARC is a very important forum. It can still play a very effective and vital role in bringing stability in this region. Of course there are differences among SAARC nations but those differences can be sorted out. At the bilateral level the countries are talking to each other. If something hasn't happened so far, something will happen soon. There will be a breakthrough. The co-operation that we are looking for with the Central Asian States will not be at the expense of SAARC. There was an organisation earlier that existed, which still exists, the RCD (Regional Co-operation in Development) consisting of Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. Now it has taken the name of ECO (Economic Co-operation Organisation). The Central Asian Republics have now become members of ECO. This body will do its own work. It will not be in at the cost or expense of SAARC at all. The feeling that you talked about has to be dispelled.

DS— India-Pakistan relations is a key element in the working of SAARC. In view of the current problems between the two countries, how do you see the future of SAARC?

NS— SAARC provides a forum in which we can discuss regional issues. Through SAARC I have been able to establish a rapport with my Indian counterpart. Others also have an opportunity of talking to each other through SAARC. However SAARC really needs to be made into more a effective organisation. It has the potential of playing a far more important and effective role than it is playing today. Some countries have put forward concrete proposals which are now under consideration of the different countries. Once these proposals are thrashed out and implemented then SAARC will be a much more effective organisation. Pakistan will continue to play its role to make it a more effective body.

DS— Frankly, SAARC has been around for a quite a few years and nothing really has happened. Even in the field of economic cooperation the body has mostly been ineffective. Does Pakistan plan to take any concrete initiative in the coming SAARC Summit in Dhaka to break the current SAARC image of being nothing more than a talk shop?

NS— We will examine that possibility.

DS— With the break-up of the Soviet Union the international power balance has shifted dramatically. How do you visualise the future of smaller nations in that context?

NS— I think it is a welcome change. As a result all the states of the former USSR have become independent. A most important aspect of this change is that it was peaceful. We are very happy at the emergence of the Republics of Central Asia. Now they have the opportunity to develop their own economies and to co-operate with their neighbours. With Afghanistan finally settling down, our links with Central Asia, as you mentioned earlier, will be re-established and Pakistan together with the Central Asian

republics can play a more effective role. They need access to a hot-water port, which is far from them, and Pakistan can provide them with that access. So the change that you spoke about, is a very welcome and pleasant change.

DS— What, Sir, is the present status of India-Pakistan relations?

NS— There is constant tension between Pakistan and India. It has been there for all these years and it is still there. It reduces from time to time but then it goes up again. But it has never been diffused. This is something that does not let both our countries develop economically. India has more than 800 million people and lot of them live below poverty-line. Resources diverting to defence build-up, buying more and more war planes, more submarines, MIG 29s and tanks. I think the whole situation is very unfair. Unfair in the sense that poor people are being deprived as resources are diverted for defence which could have been utilised elsewhere. How can we go on like this? Look what India is doing in Kashmir today. The atrocities which are being committed by the Indian troops deployed in Kashmir are really alarming. I think the world community should take note of what is happening there. There has been a massive violation of human rights. For whatever goes wrong in India—in Kashmir or in Punjab—India always blames Pakistan for it. How is Pakistan responsible for what is going on in Kashmir? It is an outcome of the suppression of the rights of the Kashmiri people over the last forty or more years. The UN resolution, a long time ago, called for a plebiscite. This was never implemented inspite of Indian commitment. About three years ago when elections were held, the turn up rate was less than 3 per cent. Is Pakistan to be blamed for this low turn out

rate, or are we responsible for the events of the last three years? So we must not try and sidetrack issues but face them. This is what I have tried to emphasize to my Indian counterpart when I met him in Rio recently, and during my meeting with him in Sri Lanka, on the occasion of the last SAARC Summit. So the meetings have been going on for quite some time. But I see very little work on the ground as yet. Kashmir is the core issue between India and Pakistan. Unless this is solved, we cannot solve any other issue. Then is the nuclear issue which needs to be resolved. It is Pakistan that has said that if India suspects our involvement, we are ready to accept neutral international observers at the 'line of control' (LOC) in the Kashmir region or even other places... no I am talking of Kashmir only. This observer group can monitor everything. It is again Pakistan which has prevented the freedom fighters to cross the line of control and go across. We did so even at the cost of shooting our own people. Our own people died in that shooting. Which country does this? Which country shoots its own people? Pakistan did, because we did not want the tension to go up any further. It is upto India now to see that the basic right of self determination is given to the Kashmiris. Otherwise this is going to aggravate the situation.

DS— Given the changing international context, what is Pakistan's world view?

NS— These are historic changes which are taking place. We welcome all of them, more so because they have come about peacefully. This is the time when peoples' rights can no longer be suppressed. The world is going towards democracy and human rights. We should no longer try to block the national process and those who will try will face an adverse world order.

DS— What are your views on the events in Afghanistan?

NS— Afghanistan is finally settling down. We are very happy that the Peshawar Accord is being implemented, as a result of which the new President has taken over— Mr Burhanuddin Rabbani. I am very happy that most of the parties are now co-operating with each other. Things will now move towards the sovereignty of Afghanistan. I am very happy at what has finally come about in that troubled country.

DS— How do you visualise the situation in Sindh?

NS— In Sindh, the army action was basically taken against the criminals. Crime rate had gone up, law and order situation was very bad, abductions for ransom was an everyday affair. It is primarily to stop all this that the army is helping the civilian government.

DS— Sir, MQM, which is one of your coalition partners, is being identified as the party harbouring most of the criminals. So the question is how could one of your coalition partners be responsible for all these crimes. How do you explain this?

NS— MQM has good and bad people within it. Every party has the same. So with the good people, or the sober elements in the MQM we are prepared to sit and talk. The army action is not against any political party but against the criminals.

DS— Our Prime Minister Begum Khaleida Zia will be visiting Pakistan soon. Can we expect some major developments during her visit?

NS— Through your newspaper please convey my highest regards, my best wishes to Begum Zia. She is really taking her country towards prosperity and I have all the good wishes for her and pray for her success.

DS— Sir, is there any surprise in store for us, during her visit, positive surprise?

NS— Like what?

DS— Surprise in the form of some major trade agreements, or investment accord?

NS— Hopefully, insallah. Let us hope so.

DS— Thank you very much, Sir, for your time.

The interview with Opposition leader Benazir Bhutto will be published on July 15.



Pakistan Premier Nawaz Sharif talking to Mahfuz Anam, Executive Editor of The Daily Star at the former's official residence in Islamabad.

# 'Steady Eddie' Steers RP in Troubled Waters

NEWLY elected Philippine president Fidel Ramos leads a career shrouded with ironies and he puts on the mantle of the presidency as a leader who seems to be neither here nor there.

Perceived to be a right-wing politician, he is despised not only by leftist activists and Marxist insurgents but also by right-wing rebel soldiers with whom he fought side-by-side in ousting former strongman Ferdinand Marcos six years ago.

An implementer of martial law, he went into the hustings on a platform as defender of democracy while his critics and political foes feasted on his record as jailer of Mr Marcos' rivals, including the husband of outgoing president Corazon Aquino.

The 64-year-old retired military general was a central figure in a popular uprising that drove Mr Marcos and his family into exile in Hawaii in February 1986 and swept to

power the widow of popular politician Benigno Aquino, who was murdered by Marcos' soldiers three years before.

A second cousin of Mr Marcos', the cigar-chomping former military officer turned against the man he helped impose martial law in 1972 to rule with an iron fist for 20 years.

Gen Ramos helped then defence chief Juan Ponce Enrile lead a pocket rebellion by a motley group of 300 mutinous junior military officers who had holed in at the defence department headquarters after Marcos discovered their plot to case him out from power.

Mr Marcos fled when close to a million unarmed civilian supporters of Corazon Aquino, a housewife who ran against him in a widely rigged snap presidential election two weeks earlier, backed the rebels and blocked troops sent to attack them.

Mrs Aquino, who was sworn into office as president after the five-day "People Power" re-

Casiano Mayor writes from Manila

President Ramos, known to be cautious and meticulous, planned his political career very well. A right-winger, he attracted a centrist constituency

volt, retained Mr Enrile as defence secretary and promoted Gen Ramos from Philippine Constabulary chief to armed forces chief-of-staff, a post Mr Marcos was reluctant to give him.

Although they were cousins, Mr Marcos had never trusted Gen Ramos, a professional soldier who graduated from the United States military academy at West Point in New York, and bypassed him in promotion. He has complained, during Mr Marcos' time against favouritism.

While Mr Enrile turned into Mrs Aquino's bitter critic later on, Gen Ramos stood by her and helped her quell seven coup attempts by rightist soldiers, two of which were led by Mr Enrile's former security

aides.

When Gen Ramos retired from military service in 1989, Mrs Aquino gave him the defence portfolio, the first former military chief to be given that job. She had sacked Mr Enrile two years earlier on suspicion that he was involved in the August 1987 coup which nearly toppled her administration.

On hindsight, Gen Ramos, known to be a cautious and meticulous man, seemed to have planned his political career very well and that his defence of the democracy installed by his patron was part of his investments that gave him rich dividends from her support to his presidential bid.

President Ramos is the first high ranking military to be-

come Philippine president since General Emilio Aguinaldo headed a revolutionary government before the turn of the century against Spain, which had colonised the Philippines for 400 years.

He is also the first Protestant Catholic in this predominantly Catholic country of 62 million people as well as the first presidential candidate to be supported by an incumbent leader.

President Ramos, who also holds a civil engineering degree from the University of Illinois, was born sleepy Lingayen, a rustic coastal town in Pangasinan province, northern Philippines, whose people are a legend in frugality and perseverance.

He is a son of a late diplomat and is married to a former school teacher, Anelita Martinez, with whom he has six children. He has a reputation of being short-tempered, especially with journalists whose questions he does not like.

President Ramos is reputed to be an individualistic but honest man. As a military officer, he was disliked by many junior officers because he would often not defend them when they commit wrongdoings. Many officers had also complained he practiced favouritism.

That could have accounted for reports that he got less votes than his closest rival, former court judge Miriam Defensor Santiago, in election precincts where soldiers and their families are concentrated.

President Ramos' election victory destroyed a highly held maxim in Philippine politics that no presidential aspirant could win an election without the backing of a strong party and wide political networks.

When he decided to run under the obscure National Union of Christian Democrats (NUCD) that adopted him as a member after he lost in the election primary of the Strug-

## To the Editor...

### Accidents and compensations

Sir, Despite public grievances and protestations in a mass scale, the road accidents have increased manifold over the years. Some potential causes lie with the way bus owners manage the things.

They put wrong type of vehicles onto the roads and highways. These vehicles are not tested everyday before the journey. If properly tested, many bus would have been dismissed for non-road-worthiness. Many accidents could have been forestalled by this.

The bus owners do not care for the proper training and health condition of the drivers which are particularly important for a long distant travel. Some drivers have the habit of taking intoxicating stuff before

taking up a trip. In some instances, the roads are in a poor disintegrable shape. The road authorities may be brought to book for gross negligence in maintenance of the roads.

Many fervent requests were made to concerned authorities but to no effect. If the bus owners are by law made to compensate for a disaster which cost a man's life or limbs, there is a possibility that some good senses will dawn upon them to keep defective buses and cranky bus drivers off the road. Until the compensation is paid, the owner should not be allowed to ply his buses on the roads. A substantial amount of compensation will further galvanize them to correct the present state of affairs.

Again the road authority

must be made to pay for any accident evidently due to their indifference about the poor shape of the road.

Reportedly, the law of this land is yet to prove its effectiveness to deliver justice. As an incentive and a challenge for our lawyers, we may introduce a system by which the lawyers may come to a written agreement with the aggrieved party that if any compensation is realized, they will get a reasonable share of it.

May we expect the concerned authorities to take earnest steps to keep defective buses and unskilled and ill drivers off the roads and maintain the roads and highways properly so that we rarely hear of hair-raising occurrences of accidents in future.

Hubert Francis Sarkar Singola, Dhaka.

### Tree Plantation Week

Sir, I wanted to buy 100 saplings from street-corner hawkers/students/volunteers at subsidized rate, for use on my private land, but I could not find any seller. Where are these sold?

About 500 sapling centres could have been opened in Dhaka and other cities. It's all talk and less action. Saplings do not grow out of speeches.

Let us have practical plans next year — action plans. Microphone should be banned or charged at Tk 1000/- per hour. Even the Govt speakers should not be exempted. Produce tree saplings with this earning.

Alif Zabr Dhaka.