Dhaka, Saturday, April 10, 1993

### Accountability in Education

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has made two very important observations in her speech opening the Forestry Institute Complex at Chittagong on Wednesday. In one she said, "the main formula of attaining economic freedom is education as it can consolidate democracy and break the cycle of poverty". We are simply touched by her power to see light through a dense forest of past and current social turbulence of unprecedented proportions blocking view. It has been an old practice, specially with politicians, to placate the clientele at hand by offering whatever pleases the latter. We hope the top politician of our nation hasn't played that old game with education.

That she has meant what she has said is borne out by her second observation about accountability in education that related to the poor tax-payer's right to question if they were getting their money's worth in the educational sector.

The Prime Minister has done a courageous thing by going down to the Chittagong University function. Whether it has been discreet on her part to do so would ever remain open to questions. Who doesn't know for how long that university was completely under siege by the armed cadres of an anti-Bangladesh political party. She has gone there without moving a simple step towards undoing that situation. Worst of all her lengthy sermon on university campus violence. bereit of commiseration with the victims and denunciation of the culprits, went to show that she was completely unaware of the goings on at that university over the better half of a decade: And that is an impossibility if only because she also happens to be the leading light of the biggest student organisation in the country besides being the chancellor of all universities of the nation.

The whole of Bangladesh's existence suffers from a serious lack of accountability. It applies more to the administrative machinery of the country. That should not stop the chief executive of the country from underlining the importance of the same in the education sector which seems to be quite innocent of the concept. We are indeed thankful that she has introduced the question of accountability in the sacred area of education. A university or a college or a school is no khas taluk of its headman or the coterie that leads it — completely immune to social demands of efficiency, probity and service. The question is however, who should be accountable to whom? An honest answer to this would not either be easy or comforting. In the last resort, it is the government itself who should be accountable to people in general for their performance in education which to date has been anything other than exemplary. Rather than the government cutting drastically the pervasiveness of violence in the educational institutions. The ruling party's student front along with those of other political parties has had an unmistakable hand in the unrelenting escalation of the same.

If education be indeed the potion that could help consolidate democracy — there is no sign yet that it works. Let us, as things are, better not talk of education breaking the cycle of poverty. The seats of education and the effective part of the community of students are all one big intolerant and anarchic anathema to democracy. And due to some late policy shifts and action's of the government education is going only to accentuate the many lines that divide the society - it is growingly becoming elitistic which it was not. That

would hardly help break the cycle of poverty. We are grateful to the Prime Minister for giving us foods for thought on education - some rare dish indeed.

## A Shocking Murder

The early morning murder of businessman and industrialist Humayun Zahir has sent a shock wave across the capital and within the business circle across the country, for the three following reasons. First it showed how widespread the reach of professional killers have become. They did not consider it to be of much consequence to go inside a well guarded home of a rich businessman, wait for hours, think nothing of being seen by many witnesses, and then shoot a person pointblank without too much thought about escape. Second, the spread of violence has now made it so easy to hire professional people to kill for money. This has shaken us all and brought into the open the question of personal safety and security. How safe are we, is a question that is haunting us all? The third concern comes from the FIR lodged by the father-in-law of the deceased. Business relationships degenerating into brutal murders are neither new, nor unique to our part of the world. In fact paid mafia hit-man settling business partnership scores are quite prevalent in the West, Japan and in Southeast Asia.

However, just as we are new in the world of business, so also we are unused to some of its brutal by-products. But the point that we would like to emphatically raise is that police must wake upto this new challenge which is being posed by the rise of organised crime, the indications of which seem to be present in the Zahir murder. Police should expose everybody connected with this killing and unearth the underworld that was behind executing it. We must hit hard against rise of criminal gangs who commit murder for a see. The root of organised crime must be destroyed right at the beginning - assuming that it is only the beginning, and that we are not already too late. These gangs, taking advantage of the widespread unemployment among youth, allure our youngmen and in some instances women, into becoming gangsters for hire. This development has to be arrested before it goes out of hand, and the gangs become more organised, sophisticated and hence — harder to catch and eliminate.

Police must act swiftly and decisively. The fact that they have one of the killers in custody is a God-sent chance to nail the case and expose all the accomplices. This is necessary to cleanse the society of the criminal gangs that are gradually penetrating deep into our lives.

#### HE SAARC summit in Dhaka is not being held at a particularly propitious moment in our region's troubled history. A variety of political problems ranging from the irritants of unresolved bilateral disputes to the trans-border implications of domestic communal conflicts will cast their pall over the august gathering. It is unlikely that the summit will resolve these issues or even put in a place a process where such issues can be collectively addressed. Nor can one be assured that a sense of states manship will prevail in guiding bilateral tensions to some form

of mutual resolution. These ongoing intra-regional tensions are held responsible for the failure of the SAARC process to progress the region towards greater economic interaction. The peoples of South Asia are advised that once these disputes are resolved South Asian economic relations will flower. Whilst South Asians wait for the ideal political temperature to bring economic relations to full bloom, the rest of the world looks towards this region with both impatience and some irritation. This has been made apparent to me in a number of meetings at a pan-Asian level where I have participated recently, first as a member of a Commission for a New Asia, sponsored by the Malaysians and strongly supported by the Japanese and more recently in a meeting in Tokyo organized by the Japan Institute of international Affairs, on the theme of Japan and South Asia A similar message was communicated by the Japanese in a recent meeting of the Japan-South Asia forum held recently

in New Delhi. Our Asian neighbours and particularly the Japanese see South Asia as a trouble spot in Asia with too many festering domestic and intra-regional tensions to enable our governments and peoples' to give priority to the overriding need to accelerate the development and transformation of our economies. Until about a year or two ago, Japan, East and South East Asia, had tended to treat South Asia's problems as academic. They tended to believe that the boundaries of Asia stopped at the frontier between Thailand and Burma and that all countries East of Thailand should be left to their

## SAARC Summit Begins Today

# South Asian Economic Cooperation within a Dynamic Asian Economic Area

by Rehman Sobhan own chaos and backwardness. For some reasons which are still not clear to me both the Japanese and their East Asian neighbours have in the recent past begun to take a new look at the South Asian region. Whether this is due to the fying its industrial base.

programme of economic reforms which have gained high visibility in the world because of the special initiative of Dr Manmohan Singh, Finance Minister of India in redirecting the Indian economy or because both the strategic and economic potential of South Asia in giving greater depth to an Asian economic area have begun to register on our fellow Asians, merits fuller investiga tion. However what is apparent is the willingness of the Japanese and South East Asians to dialogue with their

South Asian neighbors about

What has been specially in-

the future.

teresting to me in recent exchanges with our Japanese friends is that they are not inclined to view their relations with South Asian countries as essentially of bilateral concern. They view the region as a whole because they reckon that problems within a country have a tendency to overspill national boundaries and destabilisation in one country can thus escalate into a destabilisation of the region. Therefore their friendly message to their South Asian neighbors is that we should get our respective houses in order, settle our disputes and thus identify ourselves as acceptable partners in the new Asian economic future which promises to make the region into the economic eentre of the world in the next quarter of a century. They reckon that if Asia is to take its place, along with North America and Europe, as equal partners in the global community, South Asia's presence would lend weight to such an Asian presence. This suggests that a South Asia at peace with itself can be seen as a trading partner of some importance as well as an area of economic inJapanese who are potentially

willing to contribute both to the development of the region's archaic economic infrastructure as well as diversi-

#### **Economic Issues**

Can such a message from our Asian neighbors, implicit rather than explicitly offered. register in the consciousness of our leaders meeting in Dhaka this week? They will certainly be addressing some economic issues such as the SAARC report on A'leviation of Poverty, sign an agreement on a South Asia Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) and may review the SAARC study on setting up an investment fund to promote greater investment in the region which is still under completion. The SAARC poverty report, finalised under the leadership of the former Prime Minister of Nepal, Mr Bhatrai, is timely given that the region enjoys the dubious distinction of hosting the largest share of the world's poor. However the alleviation of poverty, by its nature, remains a national endeavour. We may share experiences and success stories but each government remains responsible for eliminating its own poverty where collective SAARC efforts can do little to compensate the failures of our respective national govern ments to cradicate this shameful blight on our national con-

### Implications of SAPTA

This leaves SAPTA as the only prospective positive outcome from the summit on the economic front. Unfortunately such preferential trading arrangements are no more than tokens of good intention to cooperate. They take many years of patient negotiation, usually on a commodity by commodity basis, to translate into a major programme of trade concessions. Any person who believes that under SAPTA Bangladesh will be flooded with Indian or

products from these ventures Pakistani goods, because of can be given duty free access SAPTA or that Bangladesh's or at least substantial tariff jute goods will get free access concessions to reach the to the closed Pakistan market indian market, this will open had better think again because up substantial investment opsuch a process is a long way down the road. The proposed Nepal and Shri Lanka. initial trading preference of 10% tariff concessions will do little to stimulate trade in

economies which still have

high tariff barriers in spite of

our programmes of import lib-

eralisation. What trade is tak-

ing place will continue because

Bangladeshi consumers of light

machinery, sarees, bicycles,

sugar, cattle, even eggs, find it

to their economic advantage to

gally from India. The problem

of large imports from India

into the smaller South Asian

economies is that the Indian

economy is far and away the

largest and most diversified in

the region and is thus best

positioned to met the needs of

of economic reforms put in

ance all the countries of South

Asia are committed to liber-

alise their imports. This means

importing goods from the

most competitive source,

which for a variety of items

will remain India. Under a free

market system there is not

much advantage in attacking

government policy-makers or

indeed sources of supply in

India, Thailand, Singapore,

Republic of Korea or China for

making Bangladesh into a

market for their goods. We

have the choice of going back

to greater protection for our

local industries and/or making

our local industries more

Taking Advantage of

SAPTA

mains. This is to invite greater

foreign investment from India,

Japan, China, Republic of

Korea, Taiwan, Thailand to

help in setting up export in-

dustries targeted to the large

An additional option re-

competitive against imports.

place under World Bank guid-

Under the common agenda

its weaker neighbours.

import these legally or file-

portunities in Bangladesh. A useful proposal to be considered in promoting greater and more balanced trade within South Asia would be built around the following

and growing Indian market. If

The Dhaka Summit signs

sequence of events:

SAPTA. As a special gesture of goodwill, to alleviate apprehensions that Indian's dominant economic structures will largely benefit from SAPTA. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, as a compensatory gesture to its SAARC partners would announce the iollowing special concessions: (a) Whilst all other SAARC members would give a 10% tariff concession under SAPTA. India would give a 50% concession on its tariffs to its partners. (b) As least developed member of SAARC, Bangladesh Bhutan and Nepal, India would offer them duty free entry for all imports: In practise these gestures would in the shot run lead to a very limited increase in imports from within SARC into India because most SAARC countries have little to export to India on a competitive

To compensate for the competitive weakness of the smaller SAARC members a programme of joint venture SAARC investments, targeted to set up industries in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Shri Lanka, should be studied carefully and projects floated, based on equity capital from within SAARC and from other countries such as Japan or Republic of Korea. These projects should be designated as

by tariff concessions. **Putting Economics First** in SAARC

Such a programme of con-

SAARC projects which

should automatically guar

antee it duty free entry in

all SAARC markets. This

market access should

make SAARC investment

projects eligible for loan

financing from the Asian

Development Bank, which

should set aside some

loanable funds to under-

write such sub-regional

joint ventures backed up

cessions within SAARC would turn the large size of the Indian economy from a problem into an asset for SAARC. It would ontribute to the growth, diversification and export expansion of the weaker SAARC economies. It would provide a vehicle for Asian capital to flow into South Asia and create a practical basis for more closely integrating the South Asian economies to its more dynamic South Asian neighbours. Finally and most important, giving priority within SAARC to a balanced agenda of economic cooperation, would be an incentive for the myopic political leaders of the region to resolve both internal and bilateral political problems if their countries are to both change their circumstances and benefit from the greater interaction with the dynamic Asian region. The problem with SAARC has been that our fractured economic relations have meant that a premium has been placed on political obduracy and lack of accommodation in dispute resolution within the region.

What we need is to put economics first so that the failure to settle political disputes acquires a price, measured in lost economic opportunities, loss of wellbeing for our already deprived populations and being left out of the benefits of being associated with a dynamic Asian economic area.

The writer, an internationally noted economist, had served as a Member of the Interim Government under the Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed. He is also one of the founders and the first Director of Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies.

#### T UNDREDS of thousands of migrant workers caught in the crossfire of the 1991 Gulf War are still struggling to recover their money and property they left behind when they escaped

to return. In Damascus, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) is running a special Gulf task force to study the social and financial consequences of the crisis on thousands of workers from developing countries, many of

from Kuwait - perhaps never

whom used their incomes to support whole families. They found that while some Arab workers can get to their assets without difficulty, there is a two-tier division that discriminates against former migrant workers from Bangladesh, Shri Lanka, Pakistan,

India and the Philippines. Workers from some of the Arab countries - Syria Lebanon, Egypt - can visit Kuwait not only to collect their financial assets from Kuwaiti banks, but also to check on other assets, commercial interests or real estate.

And while Palestinian and Jordanian workers cannot go back to Kuwait to retrieve any physical assets left behind, they can at least draw from their financial assets. As a result, their former deposits in Kuwait's banks are now helping to fuel a building boom in a cluster of countries, most notably Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Asians, however, have a different story to tell. Expensive airfares mean that the majority of migrant workers from the Indian sub-continent and South-east Asia cannot go back to retrieve or sell assets they may have left behind - though many could easily pay for the tickets with the proceeds.

Many have yet to get their wages from employers they cannot track or contact, or have money in savings bank ac

## The Gulf War's Real Losers Former migrant workers from Asia may be the true losers of the Gulf War. John

counts they cannot reach from their home countries or through their under-developed international banking systems.

vestment particularly by the

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESC-WA) has produced a string of reports detailing the impact of the crisis on Third World countries. Their reports say there were more than 550,000 Asians in Kuwait and a further 75,000 Asians in Iraq before the crisis.

They made up the bulk of the region's estimated 717,000 pre-crisis migrant worker population. They sent a considerable amount of money back to their home countries - around US \$370 million a year to Pakistan, US \$200 millien to India, US \$160 million to Bangladesh, and US \$90 million to Shri Lanka.

These losses to their economies have been compounded by increased fuel bills the Asian countries had to pay as a result of higher oil prices in 1990 and 1991 brought on by the Kuwait crisis, ESCWA notes.

"Bangladesh is one of the most adversely affected Asian countries by the Gulf crisis and among the least able to cope with its repercussions," says one ESCWA report.

The return of an estimated 90,000 Bangladeshis has compounded the country's economic difficulties," it adds. "In addition to the loss of an annual remittances worth US \$160 million, Bangladesh had to repatriate and rehabilitate the returnees at a cost estimated at US \$36 million.

The UN agency also says the Gulf War cost Bangladesh US \$120 million in lost exports to Iraq and Kuwatt and US \$302 million in increased fuel import costs.

Roberts of IPS reports from Amman. In Amman, the UN



Overall, it says the impoverished South Asian nation may have lost as much as US \$1.5 billion - a heavy chunk of its normal gross domestic product of US \$23 billion.

ESCWA has also collated comparable figures for other countries. The costs of the Gulf crisis to India were put at US \$3,045 million for 1990 and US \$2,869 million for 1991.

Pakistan estimates its losses at US \$2.1 billion, not least because before the crisis it was receiving half its oil from Kuwait at a concessional price of just US \$15 a barrel.

The Philippines is estimated to have sustained losses approaching US \$500 million on remittances as a result of the crisis, while increased oil costs in 1990 and 1991 were of the same magnitude. On a human scale, perhaps

the hardest hit were the returnees from Shri Lanka. The UN International Labour Organisation (ILO) says three quarters of the 101,000 Shri Lankan returnees were domestic servants, and they left their jobs with their wages unpaid for up to three months.

Moreover, the UN notes : "They were paid a meagre US \$65 per month on average and thus it would take them a long period just to repay the debt they incurred to finance the original journey to their jobs in Kuwait".

Although the Jordanian and Palestinian returnees had considerable political problems with which to contend, many of them were much better placed to cope with the economic consequences of the Kuwait crisis.

They were after all, as one UN official remarked in an unguarded moment, "the people running Kuwait". Now, the official added, "the real test is to try to get these people committed or engaged in setting up businesses at home".

But countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen - all traditional recipients of large-scale remittances from expatriate workers in Kuwait or Iraq - have done marginally better. UN officials noted that

countries tended to exaggerate their potential losses in the immediate aftermath of the crisis to secure the maximum possible aid from the Kuwaiti and Saudi authorities.

Thus Syria at one stage claimed to have sustained no less than US \$9.1 billion in losses, largely as a result of the scizure of Syrian assets in Kuwait

In fact, one UN official told

IPS: "A lot of assets were there — but no harm was done to them." This was because the Kuwaiti government, while in exile, was able to secure the cooperation of the international banking community and impose an effective freeze on transfers.

With the complete records of all bank accounts as of Aug. 2, 1990, the day of the invasion, it was able to put into effect a ruling that all transactions carried out between that date and liberation on Feb. 27, 1991 would be deemed null

This action was taken primarily to secure the assets of the Kuwaitis themselves. But it is also providing a lifeline for the hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria and

Palestine. Today, there is again a considerable outflow of funds from Kuwait to long-term migrant workers who have left the country who are able to negotiate the system.

"Pensioners, retired civil servants and school teachers are basically receiving their entitlements," says ESCWA principal economic affairs officer Nazem Abdalla. He adds that the agency is focusing on helping solve "the main problem of the area at this time the migration of two million people working in this area".

Abdalla notes these movements were not just caused by the Kuwait crisis. There were mass movement out of Iraq, with hundreds of thousands of Egyptians returning home, as a result of Saddam Hussein's eight year war with Iran.

There was also migration of Yemenis back home from Ethiopia and Somalia in the wake of civil war and economic collapse there, and a mass expulsion of some 850,000 Yemenis from Saudi Arabia because their country was held to have taken too neutral a line in the Iraq Kuwait crisis

### Illegal felling of trees

Sir, Some influential people have indulged in systematic felling of the trees at village Kamalpur under Savar PS in the absence of the owners of the land where the trees stood and some still stand, with the help of 40/50 armed musclemen and carrying them away by trucks. Under the circumstance, the villagers are passing their days and nights in great anxieties.

Mentionably, the villagers repeatedly informed the chairman of respective Birulia union and the Officer-in-Charge of Savar thana of the illegal felling of trees but to no

This illegal felling of trees as well as dwindling of environment have been continuing for a month and in the meantime, more than 1,000 trees

If the concerned depart- expected moral standard. ments such as Police and Forest Conservation do not take any necessary steps, the villagers will definitely face dire consequences. The local people opine that a neutral investigation will reveal all. Concerned.

### Moral education

Sir. To make our education more practical and effective both madrasha and general education should be merged together and a common curriculum be introduced. The madrashas can be converted into schools and certain courses now taught in madrasha incorporated into the school syllabus. This may reduce the gap between our moral education and general education and help in producing well-educated citizens with M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Insti-

### Hajj pilgrims

Dhaka.

Sir, I take this opportunity to express my sincerest thanks to the "intending pilgrim" whose letter published in your daily earlier last month acted as a commendable starter leading to a press notification of the Saudi Embassy (published in your daily on the 17th March 1993) and quelling the worries of intending pilgrims who had opted to arrange their own residential accommodation in Saudi Arabia on the basis of our government's notification published in all dailies on the 13th January 1993

which stated that "the authority will take on rent residential accommodation for only those who would ask for it."

the Saudi Embassy because of its statement that revealed that an agreement was entered between the Saudi Government and our Government on the 13th January 1993 where it was specifically mentioned that "all Bangladeshi pilgrims must reside at the house hired by the Government of Bangladesh with relevant authorities in Makkah Mukaramh and Madinah Munawarah" and "no pilgrims will be allowed to hire accommodation privately" Thus it is mandatory for all Bangladeshi pilgrims this year to take accommodation at Makkah and Madinah to be arranged by our Government.

Now confusion has been

created in my mind by an assertive reply by an authority of the Hajj Office at Mirpur I was told on enquiry that the sums of Tk. 16,000.00 and Tk. 11,500,00 deposited for two My personal gratitude to types of accommodation was for Makkah only and not for Madinah.

> Thus I request our concerned ministry to let us know specifically whether the aforesaid reply given by the Hajj Office is correct. If so, then is our Government rescinding its own terms of agreement with the Saudi Government? The clarification is essential in order to avoid confusion of accommodation arrangement at Madinah by the Bangladeshi pilgrims

Akhtari Begum

Lake Circus, Dhaka

## ''Nausicaa'

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Sir, I want to thank you and, through you, Ms. Sadaf Noori, for her very interesting article "Nausicaa - the Ocean has Landed", published in your Weekend Magazine on 2 April,

By reading her article I had the rare opportunity of having a unique glimpse of the ocean's deep and fascinating but mysterious world Can we not have something

similar in our country (may be on a smaller scale, to start with) for our children to learn from? Our government and the private sector may give some serious thought to it.

I look forward to more such

illuminating articles in your es-

teemed daily in future.

Jamaluddin Elephant Road, Dhaka