

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".

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 up to this new challenge which is being posed by the rise of organised crime.

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.

THE 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.

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 flourish.

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.

HUNDREDS 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 from Kuwait — perhaps never 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 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, Sri 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-

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 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 investigation.

What has been especially interesting 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 destabilise in one country can thus escalate into a destabilisation of the region.

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.

Japanese who are potentially willing to contribute both to the development of the region's archaic economic infrastructure as well as diversifying its industrial base.

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 Alleviation 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.

Taking Advantage of SAPTA An additional option remains. This is to invite greater foreign investment from India, Japan, China, Republic of Korea, Taiwan, Thailand to help in setting up export industries targeted to the large

Pakistani goods, because of SAPTA or that Bangladesh's jute goods will get free access to the closed Pakistan market had better think again because such a process is a long way down the road. The proposed 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 liberalisation.

Under the common agenda of economic reforms put in place under World Bank guidance all the countries of South Asia are committed to liberalise 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.

and growing Indian market. If products from these ventures can be given duty free access or at least substantial tariff concessions to reach the Indian market, this will open up substantial investment opportunities in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Such a programme of concessions within SAARC would turn the large size of the Indian economy from a problem into an asset for SAARC. It would contribute 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.

What we need is to put economies 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.

Putting Economics First in SAARC

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The Gulf War's Real Losers

Former migrant workers from Asia may be the true losers of the Gulf War. John Roberts of IPS reports from Amman.



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.

To the Editor...

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 men and carrying them away by trucks.

Moral education Sir, To make our education more practical and effective both madrasa and general education should be merged together and a common curriculum be introduced.

Hajj pilgrims 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

ing well-educated citizens with expected moral standard. M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka.

My personal gratitude to 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 Munkarrah and Madinah Munawarah" and "no pilgrims will be allowed to hire accommodation privately".

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 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

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 and void.

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.

In fact, one UN official told

"Nausicaa" 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, 1993.

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 esteemed daily in future.

Jamaluddin Elephant Road, Dhaka.