Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Wednesday, February 9, 1994

Cheers to SAARC Chamber

Big hand to the inauguration of the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the capital. It has been launched appropriately by Bangladesh Prime Minister who is the current Chairperson of SAARC. After the South Asia Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA), the structural basis for intra-regional trade looks even more strengthened by the setting up of the Chamber, this having the dual function of promoting trade as well as industrialisation in con-

However, it cannot draw any euphoric reaction. For, the Chamber begins from less than a scratch: the task facing it is stupendous. Intra-regional trade within the SAARC is a paltry 2 to 3 per cent of the region's total trade - across the globe. So. the element of extra-regional trading is simply awe-inspiring. To cut back on this by switching options inward calls for radical structural adjustments in the SAARC economies which are at the moment passionately labouring to be a part of the

global free market. How much they free their own markets to each other is therefore to be seen - to be believed. And this is the big question which stares in the face of SAARC Chamber. The newly-created body has to use its persuasion focusing on international compulsions the region faces to see the wisdom of cooperation. The appeal for a charitable disposition to mutual sacrifice should go out of fashion now. The biggest imperative for cooperation is that a number of new regional economic blocs have sprung up to exploit complementarities in trade, investment and job creation within each one of them: Even the countries on the western rim of the sub-continent, let alone the eastern one, are concerting their economic policies to accelerate the pace of collective advancement. So. South Asia cannot be left behind. The global trade volume and, particularly the investable surpluses being not something infinite, whichever countries came out of their shells to form a bloc first, have had a competitive edge over the rest remaining inchoate.

The SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry is going to be a private sector affair opening channels for energetic business and entrepreneurial contacts down the road. The dictates, whims and prejudices of political economies have undercut any serious effort for economic cooperation in South Asia. The SAARC Chamber is hope-giving on this count because of its private sector character. The private sectors have been known for exercising freedom of action - even as between countries having none-toohappy bilateral relations. This has proved to be true in other regions. There is hardly any reason why this cannot happen in South Asia where the private sectors have maintained workable relations even in adversities, big or small.

The SAARC Chamber's immediate objective is to reduce trade imbalances within the region. The joint trade body should work for implementing SAPTA in the first place helping to identify and create in the process, new export potentials in a country like Bangladesh — for instance which has a huge trade deficit with India. The industry part of the chamber can promote joint ventures in Bangladesh with buy-back arrangements agreed upon by India to the mutual benefit of both the countries. The other tasks for the chamber would be to remove tariff and non-tariff barriers and have the member-countries re-tune their fiscal policies with an eye to concretely serving the economic interests of each other. If others have moved close to a single economy it is time we took the first steps in that direction.

Right to Demonstration

The lathi-charge by the police on teachers of non-government primary schools on two consecutive days, has been nauseating indeed. The Sunday's police brutality caused injury to about 50 teachers and the Monday's excesses ended up adding five more to the tally. What happened on those days at and around the secretariat's south gate should be considered a national disgrace, no matter whether the government agrees or not. Ironically, on the first day of police assault on teachers, the country's prime minister was eloquent on the role of education at the only convocation of Chittagong University in its 27-year his-

Clearly, governance in its present style, as manifested in the handling of demonstrations, is increasingly betraying some worrying streaks ingrained in the set-up lower down — that are hardly conforming to a newer, forward-looking and liberal mould. The fact that the police do not feel any compulsion to change their ways in the equation with the public has time and again been brought to the fore by their own deplorable actions; and at the same time makes a poor commentary on the administration's ability to think of anything better in the face of a challenge.

The government must take the blame for one or the other of its ministries not paying heed to the complaints of the aggrieved parties in time and allowing the situation to aggravate to a confrontational stage. When organised groups choose to go for demonstrations, the administration resorts to force in suppressing the same. This mentality the government must be well-advised to discard. Peaceful demonstration is a democratic right and no government can and should meet it with repressive measures.

In the case of primary school teachers' demonstration, the important point is whether the processionists were unruly or peaceful. Did they provoke use of force? Reports carried in the dailies nowhere has given any hint that the teachers were at all inviting the trouble. The fact is there is no knowing how much of a demonstration is considered as a threat to civic peace and public order and a transgression requiring to be acted against. After all the teachers are not hoodlums and they deserve better treatment. Similarly, there are other sections in society to whose nature violence and unruly behaviour should be totally alien. But they too are at times roughed up after being compelled to stage demonstration.

It is exactly this unavoidable necessity that calls for a code of conduct, both for the police and the demonstrators. There should be a clear demarcation line drawn before important places where rallies, demonstrations and processions should be held back. For all we know, the police accompany processions not only to maintain traffic discipline but also to keep the processionists out of the harm's way. If this was done with the teachers' demonstrations how could these go so wrong that they had to be beaten?

same laboratories where scientists have long designed the most destructive weapons on earth, a new kind of non-violent arms research is

under way. At Lawrence Livermore in California and Los Alamos in New Mexico, where nuclear warheads were first invented and have since been endlessly refined, small teams of inventors are experimenting withdevices that will temporarily disable enemy soldiers and equipment without permanent

harm to either. Proponents of this research call it "non-lethality"

They present it as a con certed effort to develop lifeconserving, environment friendly systems for curbing aggression: high-technology devices that defeat the use of lethal means while minimizing loss of life and damage to the environment

Examples include weapons that keep airplanes grounded by preventing their engines from starting and instruments that incapacitate enemy soldiers with non-lethal chemi cals and electromagnetic pulses (EMP).

There are also infrasound waves that disorient civilians for crowd control and psychological operations and devices that confound sophisticated command-and-control sys-

They achieve their disabling effects through such temporary expedients as anti-trac-

And Now, Non-lethal Weapons ERKELEY Today, in the

Peace and conflict specialist Mark Sommer writes in this exclusive column for Inter Press Service that while a new breed of non-lethal, environment-friendly weaponry is being developed, it does not mean the world is any less dangerous.

tion agents, calmatives, stun guns, and supercaustics; more long-lasting changes are produced by laser weapons, highpowered microwaves, and nonnuclear EMP.

Officials at premier weapons laboratories in the United States view non-lethal technologies as the perfect growth industry to supplant a portion of the nuclear research scaled back by the end of the Cold

In rationale and rhetoric this new breed of non-lethal weaponry sounds like a fantasy sprung from the imaginations of a pacifist with a passion for high technology.

But it is being touted by individuals and institutions at the opposite end of the political spectrum from the classical nonviolent tradition of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther

proponents is Ray Cline, a lifetime intelligence operative and former CIA deputy director. Since his retirement he has established the US Global

Among the most ardent

Strategy Council (USGSC) to promote a "national nonlethality initiative" and other policies to advance US interests in

an uncertain new global order. The USGSC is headed by a host of conservative luminaries and include President Reagan's hardline UN ambassador. Jeane Kirkpatrick, and a pha-

lanx of former generals, admi-

rals, and defense secretaries. It formed a Nonlethality Policy Review Group in 1990 that bent the ears of then Vice President Dan Quayle, Chief of Staff John Sununu, and National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft.

The Group persuaded the Bush Administration to establish a Nonlethality Task Force under the Secretary of Defence.

The Non-lethal idea gained favour in the run-up to the Gulf War, where it was promoted as a means of immobilizing Iraqi forces and equipment without killing soldiers or civilians. With such high-level en-

dorsements, nonlethality has rapidly gained respectability in the same corridors of power from which advocates of nonviolent action have been routinely barred Support from those who

traditionally favor the aggressive use of force says much about how such seemingly benign technologies will ultimately be deployed.

Like Star Wars a decade ago, nonlethality exerts a formidable appeal, promising to render the enemy "impotent and obsolete" without the messy and morally repugnant expedient of spilling innocent blood - and the problematic challenge of changing human conscious

Both strategies begin with an eminently sensible question: In an age of dazzling inventiveness, is it still necessary to kill others in order to prevent them from killing us? Isn't human ingenuity capable of devising less harmful means of preventing harm?

This question is not only valid but vital and demands a better answer than, thusfar, has been found. As with Star Wars, the context in which this version of nonlethality is being introduced betrays its fundamentally aggressive na-

Strategic missile defense could only have worked if it replaced rather than reinforced the superpowers deadly nuclear offenses. The underlying motivation of its proponents, however, was to marry offense and defense in order to forge a more impregnable and intimidating arsenal.

As a fundamentally political rather than strategic — offensive it stole the wind from an emerging anti-nuclear movement, claiming the moral high ground by adopting the rhetoric of pacifism while dispensing with its substance.

Advocates, nonlethality appears to share a similar set of underlying motives.

Addressing the general public, its proponents emphasise the strategy's peacemaking capabilities, claim ing it will establish a new standard for civilized international behavior.

the stress is that nonlethality will "expand force options" and allow commanders to "effect control over people" where lethal force may be politically unpalatable. Advertised not as a re-

But to Pentagon generals.

placement for but a reinforcement of lethal force, nonlethality permits the discreet exer cise of military power to suppress rebellions in the devel

is it any wonder, then, that then idea of non-lethal weapons has so rapidly gained support from those for whom non-violence has always been an object of indifference if not contempt?

oping world as well as insur-

stress, by opening up employ-

ment and profit possibilities.

nonlethality can soothing a

defense industry battered by

shrinking military budgets.

In addition, its advocates

rections in the inner cities.

Conceived as a mere addition to lethal force projection. nonlethality is a brilliantly cynical strategy to render the manipulation and suppression of restive populations at home and abroad more politically acceptable.

But the velvet glove conceals an iron fist, made all the more menacing by its outwardly appealing appearance.

Although its present formulation is flawed and potentially perverse, nonlethality still raises an essential challenge to the scientists of our time: Can human ingenuity prevent harm as effectively as it has been harnessed to inflict it, or is the marriage between high technology and nonviolent values inherently a Faustian bargain?

MARK SOMMER, a research associate of the Peace and Conflict Studies Programme. University of California, Berkeley, is the author of two books on new approaches to national and global security.

Urgent Need for Agribusiness and Technology Development by Nawab Sobhan

eved near self-sufficiency in rice despite low productivity, compared to some of the Asian countries who have made more progress in the area by adopting new technologies. Therefore, it is time to think about the next generation agriculture, develop agribusiness and technology to ensure fair return on farmers' investment in agriculture to increase agricultural growth

Here farmers are using fertilizers without knowing the actual combination of ingredients needed for specific crops. Limited soil testing facilities in the public sector R&D centers even are not accessible to our farmers. High-value fertilizer use is almost absent. There is potential for the private sector to blend fertilizer and for joint ventures in fertilizer produc-

rate and GDP

The public sector has long controlled the seed sector and lately the private sector has made some progress in vegetable seed imports and marketing. Though the Industrial Policy of 1991 recognized seed processing as an industry, yet banks are not embracing this new investment opportunity because of absence of reliable feasibility analysis and knowledge of the seed market Bangladesh can be a seed exporting country if joint ventures in seed processing could be established with multinational seed companies because Bangladesh has a comparative advantage of having abundant labour force and the required soil quality for seed produc-

In the agri-machinery sector, a substantial amount of foreign currency is spent for importing diesel engines and power pumps. And the domestic manufacturers both in the public and private sector cannot compete with the imports because of their old production technology. All rice milling

machinery is imported where there is a potential scope of foreign direct investment in local manufacture. A CIDA survey report indicated that a substantial portion of available power pumps are idle for want' of spare parts and absence of repair workshops. The private sector could establish small workshops at the thana level but lack of entrepreneurship. technical know-how, and credit facilities are major constraints.

In the agro-processing sector, it is necessary to expand the processing capacity to take out excess production of perishable crops during harvesting season, because the fall in price due to lesser demand than supply during harvesting season causes a disincentive to increase production of highvalue crops, especially fruits and vegetables. However, agroprocessing is having an exceptionally difficult time with processing and marketing of vegetables, fruits, cereals, roots, spices, etc. A CIDA survey report on 53 fruits and vegetables processing units shows that they are operating at one third of installed capacity due to lack of specialized storage. high import taxes on some important ingredients and inputs of processing industries. old processing technologies. lack of quality packing and grading and absence of availability of technical services and flexible credit. Because of this situation in our food processing industries, the domestic market is captured by foreign tam, jelly, juice, pickle, and other provisions. It is necessary to improve post harvest technology to reduce loss and damage and improve processing technology to increase competitiveness of the food processing industries in domestic and international markets. Because of abundance in availability of labour, Bangladesh has a comparative

intensive crops such as fruits and vegetables. And there is scope for direct foreign investment in the food processing industry. In the poultry and livestock

sector, our progress is very poor though this sector is a major source of draft power for various agricultural operations, transportation, of animal protein, and also of cash income for rural people. Milk production suffers slow growth because of the genetically poor constitution of local breeds. lack of feed and high cost of feed production. As a result the country has become dependent on imported dairy products. The growth rate of livestock/poultry production is also adversely affected by high mortality rates caused by absence of adequate disease control measures while losses from diseases are estimated at 20% annually. The Planning Commission Report of 1991 states that domestic production of vaccines and sera against diseases are not more than 20% of the requirement. The public sector produces sufficient quantities of New Castle Vaccines, although the quality may be questionable. Some diseases like infectious bronchitis, coccidiosis and recent gumbo diseases are not prevented by vaccines produced in Bangladesh.

When imported eggs were free from taxes and levies, egg prices at the retail level decreased by 25% and local commercial poultry firms could not compete with imports due to high cost of feed production. Therefore, the feed industry should be developed to facilitate production of low cost feed by increasing the availability of maize. The modern technology of embryo transfer and animal health services are also absent in Bangladesh. In order to develop the poultry and livestock sector it is necessary to make technology available at the doorstep of farmers and poultry and livestock producers.

To expand facility for agrobased industries, and trading of non-traditional items, flexible credit during harvesting season and also availability of technology are essential. Banks need assistance in feasibility analysis for funding innovative sectors such as soil testing. fertilizer blending, seed processing, agro-processing, poultry and livestock production and embryo transfer as well as to strengthen the loan monitoring system to reduce rejections and defaults and transac tion costs. Proper technical assistance and motivation for the private sector are needed to expand credit to agribusiness sector.

In developing a market economy, information relating to market investment opportunities and technology sources should be available on a continuous basis to entrepreneurs and policy makers. The Bangladesh National Scientific and Technical Documentation Center (BANSDOC) is responsible for providing information but has a very limited capacity vis-a-vis industrial needs. In about 97% of cases, materials are not available with BANSDOC. BBS data/information are often post dated and are of a general nature which cannot be used or are helpful for agribusiness decision making. It is necessary to improve information for agribusiness and technology development and the private sector can play a vital role in making such information available on commercial basis.

The MOA has wisely initiated a large project with USAID's grant assistance for agribusiness and technology development which will accelerate agricultural growth, increase agricultural GDP, create

self employment opportunities for abundant agricultural labour force, increase export, expand export oriented/import substitution agro-based industries. alleviate poverty and improve nutritional status through increase of private sector in vestment and technology commercialization. But it is unfortunate to learn that, now after nine months, this much needed project could not be started for delay in the approval process though it was included in 1993-94 ADP

Sixty three projects (out of 134 projects included in the ADP 1993-94) are supposed to be funded by donors. But ERD has only arranged funds for 20 projects while six months of the FY have already lapsed. Given this situation, agricultural/agro industrial development will not improve and may even stagnate. Hence the need for agribusiness and technology development is so urgently felt. We need a developed agriculture for our sustenance and very existence.

OPINION Primary Education for All

Abul Quasem

May I congratulate you not only on your organising the Roundtable on such a life and death issue as Editor of the 'The Daily Star' but also for the flair with which you conducted the same. Could I focus on a few points on the subject First, The Daily Star may take the lead and devote itself to turning Ekushey as a National Movement Day for eradication of the curse of illiteracy from the country. Second, as Dr Yunus so rightly pointed out that without institutionalisation at the local level the chance of a success for this programme may remain elusive. I feel that under the umbrella of Gram Shava or Sarkar and leadership of a Ward Member, a committee com prising teachers, lmams Postmaster, social workers educated people, patrons of education etc may take up the responsibility of implementing this programme - through both formal and non-formal channels of education. Of course, all-out patronage has to come forth hand that from both local governments and the central government. Third, the literacy contents should

be oriented to life, living and surroundings of the pupil These must be uniform for formal and non-formal education all over the country. Fourth, food and nutrition of the pupil should be a core element in the scheme for sustainability of the programme. May I suggest here that teachers and pupils should be motivated to grow fruits and vegetables of the HYV in the vacant spaces of the institutions. And, in the absence of space it can be hired in the vicinity. Some schools as those been televised in the recent past have proved how they could make a success. Fifth, the class room teaching should be made attractive by the introduction of indigenous music and songs combined with story-telling and infusion of warmth in the relationship between the teacher and the taught. Last but not least, for adult literacy may I exhort that its curriculum should be to impart skills for earning a living as well as harnessing the potentials around us. Let's combine with the earning techniques to improve their quality of life.

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.

The people speak

Sir, The election for the Mayoral position is over, hopefully, now we can all have some peace and tranquility. But congratulations go to the people because they have once again proven that they are conscientious, law abiding and above all more intelligent than the politicians. This is a signal to all political parties to learn and educate themselves about the changing attitude and outlook of the voters. People want their views and ideas to be heard and implemented and through the ballots thy have expressed that.

I hope the politicians and leaders will pay heed to the new wind that is blowing. The winning in this election by any particular party is not a signal of anyone's party popularity. But it is a symbolic gesture of the people to make the politicians realise their overwhelming desire to be allowed to practice their democratic rights and prove that they are intelligent enough to decide their fate.

It is time for leaders to come down to the level of 'the people' and try to understand that the people are patriotic and they think and feel about their country.

One must not forget to ac-

knowledge the noble and hard work the Chief Election Commissioner Justice Abdur Rouf has done to give the people a free and fair election. Let us hope he can institutionalise this process to bring about a democratic system in our country. For this the politicians must strengthen his hand by playing a more responsible and matured role.

advantage in producing labour

Akku Chowdhury Dhaka

Foreign investors

Sir, I was interested to read the article "Is Foreign Direct Investment a Mirage for Bangladesh?" in your recent issue. You have indeed identified some of the factors that make foreigners unwilling to invest here. I have myself asked many foreigners why businesses are not attracted here although it is cheap. Corruption is often given as reason but business people are also very frightened because of the reluctant judicial system. Many foreigners have told me that at least one such person (a Russian national) now in Dhaka jail was 'falsely' implicated in a gold smuggling case. He said to have foolishly trusted his Bangladeshi colleague (who has

since fled the country) and

signed for a consignment that

proved to contain contraband. After one year this person still waits in jail for a trial.

How can we hope to attract foreign businessmen when, allegedly, this is how we treated those who tried to work here?

Shahidul Islam Block C. Tajmahal Road Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Rupsa bridge and Rajshahi town bypass road

Sir, A recent press report

says that honourable Communication Minister has laid the foundation stone of Rajshahi town bypass road which will cost roughly Taka fifty crore. Traffic jam in Rajshahi town has not assumed such an alarming form that construction of a bypass road at such a huge cost has become urgent. Basically, I am not against bypass roads. If resources of the country permits, we can have bypass roads for all towns. But when resources are limited, we have to go by national priority rather than popular demands.

Due to resource constraints, construction of Rupsa bridge near Khulna town could not be taken up so far, although its economic importance is thousand times more than Rajshahi bypass road. Transportation of goods to and from Mongla town, Khulna, greater Jessore, greater Kushtia etc will be immensely facilitated with the construction of Rupsa bridge. Moreover, this will establish direct road communication between Khulna and Bagerhat.

Now that we have a democratic

Govt in the country public fund should be spent in such a manner that projects with greater economic returns get

May I, therefore, request the Prime Minister and Parliamentary Committee on Ministry of Communication to study dispassionately the relative importance of the two projects and decide which project should get priority. So far Rupsa bridge project has received only lip service. It de-

Mrs Momtaj Jahan Fulbari, Sylhet

serves better attention.

priority.

Govt Service sector

Sir, An interesting news on active coordination and cooperation between two service oriented Govt organisations was recently published in a section of the press. According to the news, the PDB authority of Barisal snapped the electric connections of the Barisal Telephone Exchange without any notice putting 1400 telephone sets out of order as a sequel to snapping of 18 telephone connections of PDB office by the T & T authority for realising arrear telephone bills amounting to Taka 24 lakhs. The PDB did the same to T & T on the same ground, i. e. to realise arrear electric bills.

Meanwhile, after a meeting between T & T and PDB officials, a compromise was made and PDB restored electric connection to Barisal telephone exchange. But both the authorities reportedly didn't pay the arrear bills.

If such style of cooperation

and coordination continues to prevail between service oriented Govt departments, one can very well imagine the intensity of public sufferings accruing out of it. I think this sort of coordination and cooperation is existing between almost all the service departments including, PDB, T & T, WASA, Gas etc.

In order to upgrade the standard of these services, a sound communication and coordination has to be established between various departments. This will also bring improvement and development to these service related sectors.

M Zahidul Haque Asstt Prof. BAI, Dhaka

Bank loan

Sir, Very often we come across items in national newspapers about drive to find potential investors and industrialists. Bankers are being told to disburse money which are now lying accumulated with them, for the growth of industries. Industrialists are also being advised to make the best use of the opportunity.

In fact it is not understood as to why the Govt. shall to an nounce by beat of drum and request the potential industrialists to approach banks for drawing money for their business concerns. It is common knowledge that a person who needs money will approach the bankers, negotiate and receive loan for industry on terms and conditions as offered by the banks, if acceptable, and it does not require the pleading

of any other agency.

Government may see that the bank loan terms should be such that the loanees, upon utilisation, may make a profit to pay the instalments and interest. No loanee is expected to dispose of his personal property to repay the loan and so loan terms should be commensurate with fiscal laws.

H I Gias 80. Darus Salam, Mirpur,

Dhaka-Sylhet highway

Sir. A few years back a plan

was prepared for expansion and improvement of the major highways of the country. These are Dhaka-Cittagong, Dhaka-Dinajpur and Dhaka-Sylhet highways. While expansion of Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Dinajpur roads are nearing completion, expansion of Dhaka-Sylhet road has not even commenced. Dhaka-Sylhet road passes through the districts of Narsingdhi, Brahmanbaria, Habigonj and Moulavi Bazar districts. There is heavy traffic on the road and it is very difficult for the exiting road to bear the load. As a result its condition is deteriorating fast. But nobody seems to be bothered about this vitally important road.

May I, therefore, request the ministry of Roads of Highways and Ministry of Finance to take up expansion and repair of the road, which is long overdue at the earliest now

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantt. Dhaka.