Dhaka, Sunday, February 5, 1995

## Follow up on Euromoney

It is not often that we do a good job in attracting foreign investors to take a serious look at Bangladesh. But we did so in the just-held Euromoney-BOI conference in Dhaka. Not only that, the organisers did a splendid job of bringing together more than 700 local investors also. Together, the conference brought in nearly thousand registered participants. With the inaugural session, in spite of an unfortunate hartal call, bringing together more than 1600 business leaders from Bangladesh and abroad. All this makes for an excellent start. But let us not forget that it is only a start. And as starts go, unless there is effective and immediate follow up, much of its

gains will be lost. It became obvious in the conference that the area where the potential is the highest for foreign investment is the energy sector. It is in that sector that we have the chance of moving fast, and attracting large investments. However, unfortunately, it appears that we are not moving fast enough in that sector. An air of disappointment pervaded throughout the conference at the fact that even after so many months we still do not have an energy policy. This, despite the repeated assurances by the government, including the minister himself, that it would be coming out soon. Interested parties in the energy sector returned from the conference saying that there was nothing new in what was said, which had not already been said before. Criticism was also made about the general preparedness on the government side. Participants felt there were more of lectures of pious wishes, and little of brass-tacks from the host country. Criticism was also made that the whole attention of the government was focused on the foreign investors, and that not sufficient efforts were being made to address the local entrepreneurs, who after all, will form the backbone of economic resurgence of Bangladesh, as and when it comes.

We raise these issues because we feel there is a lot to learn from them. Now that the conference is over, we should learn from these criticisms and take immediate actions to make up for whatever was missed out during the conference. We echo the above criticisms. We do think that too much time has been wasted in finalising our energy policy, which we should have immediately. There is hardly any scope to overemphasise this need, as the trend set by this sector will have a singular effect on the whole gamut of foreign in-

vestment in our country.

#### **Tribal Refugees**

Our special committee on the CHT affairs may have come back empty-handed from the Indian state of Tripura but not without the satisfaction of having done its job well enough. It made a serious on-the-spot bid with the Indian authorities and the tribal refugee leadership to revive the process of repatriation, which ground to a halt last July.

In the first place, there should not have been an interruption in the repatriation process as this had started, and was advancing, in pursuance of an omnibus agreement signed between the two sides which duly covers all aspects relevant to the return of the refugees. Notably, in the latest initiative, the special committee remained politically as representative as before, with Rashed Khan Menon and Kalparanjan Chakma on it, despite the well-known parliamentary gridlock. Secondly, the Indian government, as the host to the refugees, stands committed to their quick repatriation to Bangladesh in terms of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Communique issued on May 9, 1993.

The US state department's country report on Bangladesh inter alia stated that there was no major incident of terrorism or violence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts during the whole of 1994. In fact, the extension of ceasefire and that of general amnesty until 31st of March shed a positive light on the situation in the CHT. Simultaneously, one should not miss the message contained in recent reports that speak of a drastic reduction of 'military presence' in the area. Needless to say, all these combine to emphasise an atmosphere in the CHT that ought to allay any political misgivings on the part of the tribal refugees.

Against this background, the basically integrated issues of return and re-settlement of the refugees can be treated as a purely humanitarian concern, hardly a matter for haggling on peripheral details or confusing these with politics. We say, respect the agreement, other things will follow automatically.

Our hope is, the words of encouragement the Bangladesh delegation members have left behind at the four refugee camps in Sabrum, their energetic pursuit of the matter with the tribal refugee leadership, and finally, their having urged the Indian government to resume the repatriation,

will not go in vain.

#### Middle East Peace

The Arab-Israeli summit, hosted by President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo, on Thursday, was neither comprehensively Arab, with Syria going uninvited, nor was it solidly Israeli as Rabin headed a beleaguered minority government. Yet conditions in that region being far from perfect, any effort to bring, adversarial forces together would merit applause, regardless of the degree of cohesion or unity of purpose achieved.

From this standpoint, the assemblage of Yasser Arafat, Yitzhak Rabin, Hosni Mubarak and King Hossein goes down well with the world. In a sense, it may even rank as something of a historical landmark in that the Middle East peace talks were thrown out of gear by suicide bombings of the extremists. That, according to the joint communique, issued at the end of the summit, Arafat and Rabin are to resume the moribund process of negotiations is itself big news no doubt. Both the leaders have returned to their respective constituencies hopefully a bit stronger. As far as the peace-loving sections among the Palestinians and the Israelis go, the prospect for renewed talks between the PLO and Israel, would be greeted with some sense of relief. Nevertheless, so long as an agreement is not reached ending Israel's closure of the occupied West Bank and self-ruled Gaza Strip or the Jewish settlements, the extremist groups among the Palestinians will enjoy an upperhand.

A mere denunciation of violence and terror in the Middle East can not help unless a tangible measure of success is on the ground towards a comprehensive peace — first within the perimeter of each set of bilateral relations and then beyond in the overall regional context. Syria has to enter the peace process.

### Bosnia-Herzegovina: Black Spot in the Heart of Europe. Arshad-uz-Zaman writes from Istanbul

No single event of our times has so dominated the world attention. For three solid years Bosnia is front page news and a must in the electronic media. Indeed the images from Bosnia are so gruesome that many ordinary citizens have simply turned their faces away from the news programmes on the TV.

If Bosnian crisis is a global one in scope, for the Islamic world, it has a very special meaning. On 28 June 1389 on the Field of the Blackbirds in Kosovo, Ottoman Turks defeated the Serbs. The Ottoman Empire, which was sweeping through the southern part of Europe and North Africa. lasted in Yugoslavia till 1878. Visitors to Yugoslavia could not have failed to notice the rich folklore of Ottoman 'atrocities' woven by the Serbs, who had a majority. What held the entire Yugoslavia together was the memory of war against Hitler's hordes, who killed 350,000 Yugoslavs of various nationali-

ORE than three years

ago, the Republic of

Y Yugoslavia splintered

and the noise was so loud that

it could be heard from the

farthest corner of the globe.

The event was taking place in

the heart of Europe and not a

forgotten corner of another

This major event of our

times did not take place

overnight but was in the works

in the twilight of the rule of

Josii Broz Tito, who by the

force of his personality and

united six republics and two

automomous regions and

welded them into the Republic

of Yugoslavia. This Republic

came and went with him. What

we are witnessing since is the

fight for the spoils and it is a

has so dominated the world

attention. For three solid years

Bosnia is front page news and a

must in the electronic media.

Indeed the images from Bosnia

are so gruesome that many

ordinary citizens have simply

turned their faces away from

the news programmes on the

TV. Thanks to satellite TV

these pictures have an element

of immediacy and proximity

ndia's ruling Congress

part v. riven by, internec-

ine quarrels and elec-

toral setbacks in recent

provincial elections, is once

again looking for help to Sonia

Gandhi, the Italian-born widow

of former prime minister Rajiv

50 MPs want Sonia to take

charge of the party presidency,

saving she is the only one ca-

pable of providing "credible"

leadership for the Congress

And despite her ostensible

reclusiveness, the widow from

Turin, Italy: is responding. She

openly sided with Arjun Singh.

the Cabinet Minister who re-

signed on 234 December, criti-

cising Frime Minister

Narasimha Rao's economic re-

forms and the party's alleged

involvement in corruption

calling for her to become more

active in the party and Sonia

recently appointed him a

trustee of the Rajiv Gandhi

and does not openly involve

herself in politics. But since

her husband's assassination by

a suicide bomber in 1991 she

is often consulted by Rao and

his aides about government

policies, and wields consider-

And though Sonia is keep-

ing India guessing about her

political intentions, few doubt

her ability to after the course

of Indian politics as custodian

able clout in the party.

Sonia holds no public office

Singh is among the MPs

A vocife rous group of about

Gandhi.

scandals.

Foundation.

that it grips our minds.

No single event of our times

very uneven fight.

con tinent.

ties, mainly Serbs. This was 'ethnic cleansing' Nazi style. The Serbs have carried out their ethnic cleansing on the hapless Muslims of Bosnia for the last three years. The figures of the Bosnian drama are horrendous - more than 200,000 dead. most of them civilians including those in the detention camps. There has been mass

rapes more than 2 million people are homeless. The number of killed or those driven from their homes are larger than any other event since the Second World War.

The international commus nity and particularly the UN have been wrestling with this problem since the outbreak of the crisis. There is worldwide consensus that the Bosnian crisis originates from one simple fact — Serbs' insatiable appetite for territorial aggran dizement at the expense of Muslims of Bosnia. Since the Serbs outnumber and outgun the Croats and the Muslims. they have managed to conduer nearly 70 per cent of Bosnia. By pounding on Sarajevo day in and day out, they have turned this beautiful capital of Bosnia. which once staged Winter Olympics, into a ghost town. There have been more Security Council Resolutions on Bosnia than any other single topic. The UN troops are on the ground and the latest the-

atre is Bihac manned by troops

from Bangladesh. UNPROFOR, which has become a household name, has the unenviable task of performing a holding operation. This force will shoot if only shot at. The Serbs have had a field day mauling the poorly equipped Muslims. since UN troops are not allowed to intervene. Even the movement of convoys carrying essential supplies of food and medicine for the beleaguered Bosnian Muslims, has been held up because of Serbian in-

transigence. Faced with this situation, European Union (EU) has presented a sorry spectacle of total paralysis. There have been mediators galore. Vance. Owen, Stoltenberg are household names. An attempt to piece together all the efforts to make disgorge Serbia, even partially her ill gotten gains. would make one dizzy. One hears off and on Nuremberg style War Crimes Trials but hardly a follow up. It is as if the international community is

suffering from collective paral-

The hope that was pinned upon the US seems to have all bút evaporatéd. US, the sole Superpower, was committed to finding a solution. She was in a position to operate through the UN, as she had done in the case of Iraqi aggression against Kuwait. Indeed President Bill Clinton announced his determination to use air power to thwart Serbian aggression. On a few occasions bombing raids have been carried out to deter Serbs from going too far. Yet the present situation is that the US has preferred to retreat from her earlier resolve.

Bosnian crisis has been a traumatic experience for the Islamic world. Here in the heart of Europe a tiny gailant. nation of Muslims has stood up to Christian Orthodox aggression. Indeed in Europe this is the only state with a Muslim majority population. Europe takes pride in its human rights

states. Yet human rights are being daily violated before their eyes in Bosnia. The comparison between the energetic action by the US-led coalition to defeat Saddam Hussein and the passivity in the case of Bosnian Muslims, is too obvious to be missed. That there is oil in Kuwait and none in Bosnia, brings repeated charges against the West of 'double standard'. As far as the OIC is concerned action has been channeled through the 5nation Contact Group.

and secular character of their

, Willy-nilly the Islamic world has to channel its action through the UN, where the US has a decisive voice. On the other hand it is inconceivable that the World of Islam will sit by and allow the Muslims of Bosnia smothered by superior Serbian force.

if the Bosnian crisis has lingered so long it is because of the passivity of the West, who have no real stake in the outcome. They are playing the old European game of the pre-Second World War vintage. In the process the world is being made to watch daily an unending horror movie, which

## The 'Sonia Factor' Continues to Rumble

Rahul Bedi writes from New Delhi

Indian Prime minister Narasimha Rao is having a hard time, with a poor showing in state elections, the resignation of his No. 2, and the dismissal of three ministers after corruption probes. 'As well as dealing with several open rivals, he is also keeping an eye open for any moves by the widow of his assassinated predecessor.



India's Sonia Gandhi, Arjun Singh: : Waiting in the wings?

of the political legacy of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty which ruled India for 40 years.

"Operating from behind the scenes Mrs Gandhi can change the course of Indian politics" savs a Congress party MP.

Before Rajiv, his mother, Indira, and his grandfather. Jawaharlal Nehru, were prime ministers.

workers eager to solicit her help in getting a ticket to contest the forthcoming elections in-five states. All the hopefuls are keen to meet "Madam. convinced she is the fountainhead of Congress power.

hordes of Congress party

However, close friends. mostly school and airline chams of her late pilot-turned-

politician husband, maintain she will shun politics because it led to the assassination of her husband and, seven years earlier, his mother Indira.

They say Sonia is content with her involvement in social work executed through the well-off Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, which she heads.

But despite her ostensible political disinterest, the "Sonia factor" invariably surfaces in politics whenever the ruling party faces a crisis.

It began immediately after Rajiv's death when lovalists appointed her party president and again, a few months later when Rao's newly-elected government allocated one billion rupees to her Foundation.

Both offers, however, were politely declined — after a suit able interval during which she gauged public criticism. Ever since, however, she has continued to command attention in influential political and public circles.

Most visiting heads of state make time to call on Sonia in her well-fortified bungalow in Delhi's poshest neighbour-

hood, protected by Special Protection Group commandos She regularly meets ministers and MPs and holds "durbars' or private audiences with

Congress workers twice a

Congress MPs say the Rajtv Gandhi Foundation is the ideal way for Priyanka, her pretty 24-year-old daughter, to enter politics. Recently graduated from a New Delhi college and presently teaching in a nursery school. Priyanka reportedly harbours political ambitions. unlike Rahul, her older brother

The Foundation's aim of uplifting the poor, promoting literacy and establishing a scientific think tank can easily be translated into, political mileage for Priyanka, say party insiders.

Besides, it works closely with the government and the Congress party, a factor which will further help Sonia fashion a constituency for her daughter until she comes of age and, as is widely believed by Congress party insiders, stands ofor parliament in the 1996 general elections.

is played by real people.

Until then, however, Congress MPs say Sonia will continue to covertly exercise political power and continue to remain in the news. She already enjoys the overt support of a powerful section of Congressmen, including cabinet ministers who want a member of the Nehru-Gandhi household to continue to dominate Indian politics.

But senior Congress people opposed to the perpetuation of dynastic rule say Sonia is currently inhibited from making any open political move because of investigations into a \$50 million kick-back scandal involving defence imports from Sweden which reportedly involve her Italian business friends, some of whom have fled India.

The kick-back scandal contributed to the Congress party's defeat in the 1989 elections and Rajiv's ousting after he tried, rather obviously, to stymic investigations into it.

Sonia's plans may become known over the next few months. Until then, there's even money on her succumbing overtly to power or reverting once again to being apolitical, surrounded by her children and wealthy sisters from

There are, however, fewtakers for the latter option. - GEMINI NEWS

RAHUL BEDI is an Indian freelance journalist.

## Sonia is mobbed daily by Asia: Backpedalling in Traffic.

ANGKOKS residents spend the equivalent of 35 days in a year trapped in snailpaced traffic. In Singapore, motorists pay stiff fees for the right to own a car because of the island's limited space. The Hong Kong government is studying a proposal to use car ownership quotas to ease traffic jams.

To many, these traffic woes are a price wealthy Asians must pay for their economic success. That success has seen car demand surge by more than 300 percent in some Asian countries in recent years, even as Japanese and US automakers square off in the booming market.

But experts see this as a symptom of a disease called 'automobile dependency' that excessively equates motorisation with economic progress.

This culture of cars has left gridlocked, exhaust-chocked cities gasping for air and increasingly hostile to native non-motorised forms of transport that are used by poorer segments of the population and provide jobs for them.

"We're caught in a regionwide urban traffic jam, in a mindset that motor vehicles equals modernisation equals development," says Brian Williams, programme director of the US-based Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP).

Williams, who is in Manila to advise on streamlining the

city's traffic nightmare, says Asia's economies could choke on their growth if they copy the West's unsustainable model for heavily-motorised urban development.

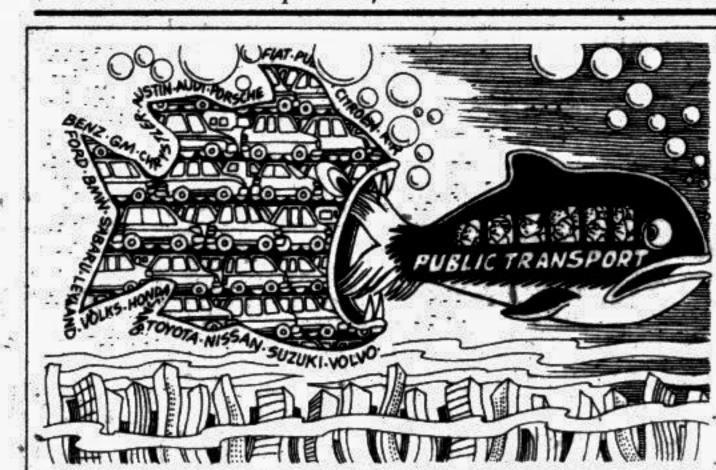
Western countries zoomed along this path till they saw that even current efforts to stabilise emission levels cannot keep pace with the number of cars being bought and used.

Williams suggests that governments use more mass transport systems, rail and buses to move people and goods in balk, and allot resources and space for non-motorised vehicles (NMVs)-like. bicycles, pedicabs and rickshaws that are efficient for shorter trips or in trafficblocked streets. But in many Asian cities, pedicabs are still regarded as primitive and urban planners map out streets with only cars in mind.

The average travel speed in Bangkok has slowed to two km an hour, but Thailand remains Southeast Asia's fastest-growing vehicle market. Some 600,000 cars are added to Bangkok's streets every year and sales for the year 2000 are forecast to reach 900,000 vehicles which is twice 1993

Japan's auto makers — who have more than 90 percent of the Thai, Indonesian and

Traffic jams and air pollution have often been seen as symbols of economic growth. But things have got so bad in Asia that cars ·have become a health hazard and are retarding growth. Johanna Son of Inter Press Service reports from Manila.



Philippine markets - are making Thailand their production base. Honda Motor Co in late October said it would open a third plant there in 1996. Toyota Motor Corp will hike production in Thailand by 50 percent over three years.

The Big Three car giants of the United States - General Motors, Ford and Chrysler - are also preparing to take on Japan's supremacy in Southeast Asia, as demand peaks in a region expected to post 7.3 percent growth this

Nearly one million cars and trucks were sold in the six countries of the Association of Southeast 'Asian Nations (ASEAN) last year, more than ASEAN comprises Brunei,

Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore. Overall vehicle sales in the region are expected to double by 2000. Vehicle growth in the Philippines rose by 329 percent from 1989 to 1993. In Malaysia, car sales rose by 290 percent as per capita income shot up by 30 percent between 1987 and 1991.

The solution to easing traffic congestion may not be as simple as building more highways which just produce more traffic, because they encourage people to buy cars and travel more. And as highways crisscross cities, traditional modes of transport , are being squeezed out from places like Phnom Penh. Dhaka and Hanoi. In Indonesia and Malaysia, communities have protested bans on pedicabs.

The car fever has also hit bicycle-friendly China, where residents and government cadres today fancy imported vehicles and often equate bikes with backwardness. China makes 40 million bicycles a year and they are used in 60 percent of all urban trips, but bicycles are being banned from downtown Shandhal and Guangzhou.

"I think they're backpe-

dalling," Williams says, adding that bikes may cause some congestion but are not the main culprit. "It is good to ask:

who's in the way of whom?" ITDP also says excessive emphasis by foreign funding institutions on building roads and highways is worrisome because these projects entail social costs like relocation of affected residents. Ten thousand families are being displaced for Manila's South Tollway project. designed to ease traffic on the

main highway. So far, cities going back to transport basics are mostly in developed countries. In New York, for example, housing authority officials use bicycles and bike messengers who weave in and out of traffic have become popular. Some employers provide shower facilities for biking employees.

Here in Asia, it is Japan that is taking the lead. The country, where 1.3 million bicycle trips are made daily, is investing in urban rail systems and has started to subsidise bicycle parking.

Critics point out that many Asian cities have become too polluted or unsafe for residents to use bicycles in. But Williams says there is much room for mixing modes of because transport 'automobile-based systems are dirty and not cost-effective.

The point, he adds, is that cars are not the only way to move around.

Ardha Satya

ments in the form of hartals

and blockades being meted out

to the hapless people of

Bangladesh by the Opposition

reminds me of an award win-

ning Hindi film 'Ardha Satya'

or half truth. In that story the

wanted his college educated

son to join the police which

the son refused. So the father

started beating his wife until

the son could not stand it any

Does' the same fate await

us? I agree whole heartedly to

the content of the letter by A

concerned citizen on 26 Jan-

uary in your paper about organ

longer and relented.

father, a retired havildar,

Sir. The series of punish-

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.

#### Quo vadis democracy

Sir, I refer to the letter under caption "Quo vadis democracy?" which appeared in your esteemed paper of the 19th January 1995.

Mr Mansoor's allegory to his Japanese friend's remark that in 1940s Japanese ministers would commit Harakiri but now being civilised they resigned accepting their responsibility (even if symbolical) in connection with a railway accident in Japan. Perhaps, we are not lagging behind either. When we were under the for-

eign rule and "less civilized" we could hear of such acceptance of responsibilities but now that we are independent and "more civilized" our ministers very promptly discharge their responsibility by being very prompt in suspending the pointsmen, linesmen, the station master, etc.. Mr Mansoor inadvertently omitted a great example of the courage of accepting moral responsibility shown by late Lal Bahadur Shastri, when he resigned as Minister of Railways in the Indian cabinet of late Pundit

Nehru accepting moral responsibility after a Railway accident in India. What a moral strength! Later, after the death of Pundit Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri was made the Prime Minister of India. In recent articles on Railway System in Bangladesh, you are giving picture of the condition of tracks and carriages of Bangladesh Railway system. the moral responsibility lies not only with the Minister for Railways but the governments. present and the past. We claim we are a civilized

independent and democratic nation. Perhaps some may think we can do whatever we like, because we are democratic! We may close roads at will to 'arrange public meetings on the thoroughfare (by any of the parties, be it BNP, Awami League, Jatiya Party of Jamaat) and hold the traffic. Aren't we democratic? Day and night the

parties are fighting for the democratic rights of the people. Why should we the public be selfish and complain when our near and dear ones die in ambulances unable you reach the hospital in time, or if our properties turn into ashes because fire brigades cannot reach on time or we miss our planes or launches on our way to board, to be at the bedside of a dying mother or a father, or a police party cannot rush to help some one being mugged — of course how can policemen go to anyone's aid when the parties are busy trying to establish our rights!

And Marion earth, after all can our cemen come to my aid if I suppling threatened by muggers, dacotts, or hijackers. After all they cannot waste public money on petrol unless a muster by better has been committed and an FIR has been property filed in person at the proper Thana! After all we don't have "999" emergency numbers that we can call a policeman if needed. Well that is another story.

And then these aborodhs! Our very dear political parties - all of them - deserve our highest praise for their untiring effort to establish our rights".

But who cares about our Constitutional rights to "move freely throughout Bangladesh' guaranteed by Sec. 36 of our Constitution? Who cares about our right to "conduct our lawful trade or business" guaran teed by Sec. 40 of our Constitution?

May the Almighty save us from these "saviours". We have seen all of them in action at different times over the last 48

A disgusted and frustrated citizen.

ising protest march against hartals and blockades May invite more views on this sub-

Iskander Mebh Guishan, Dhaka

# ject through your columns?