Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Thursday, April 27, 1995

# Pak-Bangla Ties

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's 'two-day official visit to Pakistan seems to have brought into focus some of the less explored or even unexplored areas with tremendous potential for bilateral cooperation. Begum Zia and her Pakistani counterpart Benazir Bhutto have also expressed their common view that the South Asian region should evolve a 'collective position' for protecting its interests at the international level. This is actually a reiteration of a position adopted at the 7th SAARC summit in Dhaka.

The two countries needed to take a look at the baggage of history strictly within the purview of bilateral relations for a re-invigoration of their ties. However the joint communique is conspicuous by its silence over two of the most outstanding issues admittedly vexing relations between the two countries. These are the repatriation of a quarter of a million of Pakistani citizens living in Bangladesh and eagerly waiting to return to Pakistan; and Bangladesh's claim to pre-1971 assets. We do not say these issues should stand in the way of breaking new grounds on bilateral cooperation in the areas of trade and investment. In fact, those issues can be addressed even after relations have improved in various other areas. What is needed is the sincerity of will and purpose.

If this was any criterion for the two countries to come closer, then Begum Zia's visit has amply demonstrated its fulfilment. The fact that the Pakistani Prime Minister has signalled that her government is ready to consider reduction of tariff on the import of jute and jute goods from Bangladesh bodes extremely well because Bangladesh is in a position to meet all of Pakistan's requirement of these two items. Pakistan's willingness to buy telephone cables from Bangladesh also is a demonstration of her intent to cut back on the trade imbalance. Although Pakistan has agreed to collaborate in the energy sector, one wished there were some more details on this. Both countries have recently signed memoranda of understanding with American companies for power generation. This is an area that calls for huge investment and that Pakistan is coming forward to assist Bangladesh in this field is good augury. The understanding on agricultural cooperation goes down very well here as well.

Let the goodwill extend to the entire region for turning it into a most vibrant economic zone.

### Narsingdi Hell

Narsingdi is a haunted town now. Panic has overtaken the ordinary conduct of life there as every morning — over a fortnight's time — brings in new cases to people with bludgeoned head, dead or very close to it. Since the first of this series of killings occurring on April 11, 20 cases of battered head have been found, six of these dead and the rest surviving till now with a few in a grievous state and some with impaired faculties. Narsingdi is only a district town, indeed an overgrown prosperous village. How can its small and close cohesive society take such mauling of the mind?

The pattern of the crime is unusual. All the victims were attacked while sleeping out in the open. With the weather sizzling as never before, people prefer to sleep out. And there is again a goodly number of people who do not have a roofed place to rest. The word for them is float-

Serial killing of the Jack-the-ripper type is quite unknown in our country. And the attacks speak of a team of killers more like the Brazilian vigilante that have for years been prowling the streets of mega cities like Sau Paulo and killing floating young people by the hundred. What can be behind the Narsingdi killings — discouraging the squatters from swarming the town? Who is going to benefit from this and how?

The incredible situation in Narsingdi is a direct threat to all that goes by the name of civilisation. Security, authority, law and order. And is a murderous stab at the functioning of the government. This is not the case of a stray and lonely maniac striking unpredictably at unlikely places. An organised gang of criminals working in groups and striking within a known and small area - should have been a dream case for police. At the same time this could have been a great occasion for social resistance action. Why isn't anything at all moving there in Narsingdi except the killers' bludgeon?

Is it a case of a few seating in elevated perches in Dhaka taking the hellish situation as one of only local importance deserving to be handled on the thana level? The authorities should know better and it is expected that they would forthwith bring the whole governmental power to bear upon the tiny area of challenge to authority and law and humanity.

Passing of a Stalwart

Mr G M Syed, the colourful Sindhi political leader died on Tuesday in Karachi. He was in coma for about a month and died of respiratory problems. He was interned in his own house in 1992 on charge of sedition. All his life he had been in and out of jail — a victim of political persecution. As a fit finale to his unbending political will he died in incarceration.

His life spanned almost the whole of this century and he was a senior political leader when India was partitioned in 1947. Although he had come close to Congress leaders Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in the early years of his political career he later on switched over to Muslim League in the forties joining the party in its fight for Pakistan.

Subsequently, he fell out with the Punjabidominated Pakistan establishment, and he remained an island of hope and struggle for all who felt the same way. For this honour he had to pay a hefty price — about three decades behind two bars.

A man of courage, probity and erudition was he. With his death a light goes out of the Pakistani political scene — a light of democratic inspiration and cultural self-determination.

He was a good man, steadfast unto death in his love of his land and his people. We mourn his

loss.

# The Great Silent Majority

The trend of the masses has been to revolt against the system and prefer to go outside the political system to search for saviours who promise to take them back to their basic needs and desires.

them back to their basic needs

N this age of electronics

and mass communications, the visual barrage

of propaganda material plays a

distinctive part in the forming

of public perceptions. Demo-

eracy is thus, in a manner of

speaking, a hostage to the

media. The influence of the

media is seen to dominant

effect even where the

percentage of literacy is quite

high; in countries with low

literacy rate, TV and radio

occupy a much more over-

whelming role in influencing

the mass mind. However, in

the matter of exercising their

right of adult franchise there is

a large grey area. The electoral

pattern shows that on the av-

erage almost 50 per cent of

the electorate do not take part

in the exercise of adult fran-

chise in most parts of the

world, both in the developed

and underdeveloped, though

due to different reasons rang-

ing from cynicism to apathy. At

the same time, even among

those who do vote, a greater

percentage is usually silent

rather then vocal. For the most

part, whether it is a dictator-

ship or a western-type democ-

racy, it is a strong and/or shrill

minority with a gift of the gab

or the advantage of a charis-

matic personality which gen-

erally holds sway over the si-

lent majority. This led late US

President Richard Nixon to

describe this silent mass by

coining the phrase. "the great

based on the political party

system where there is a clear

ideological divide. Even today

Democrats and Republicans.

Conservatives and Labour, So-

cial Democrats and Christian

Democrats, Socialists and Re-

publicans, etc. etc. Not so in

third world countries, espe-

cially those based on more or

less, some religious ideology.

With the cold war between

capitalism and socialism end-

ing in favour of the former, the

lustre for socialism among

third world leaders faded

rapidly away. In any case many

so-called socialists were found

to be the greatest thieves of

public money or property.

Even committed socialists be-

came born-again capitalists as

Thatcher-ism swept away the

ravages that socialism had

wrought to already fragile

economies. As the distinction

between the political parties

became blurred, fresh ideas

and chartsmatic personalities

emerged as the dominant

force in politics. Bedevilled by

nepotism and corruption, with

accountability a matter of

rhetoric only (or used at best

for political victimisation), the

masses across a wide swath of

nations have increasingly

turned to anything that

promises clean government

and a return to basic family

values enshrined in every reli-

gion and civilization. The trend

of the masses has been to re-

volt against the system and

prefer to go outside the politi-

cal system to search for

saviours who promise to take

there is a difference between

Western type democracy is

silent majority."

and desires. These "saviours" have also tended to mostly appear from outside the political system as a reaction to the system in vogue, those within the system having hackneyed answers only, if any, and even then basically found to be universally corrupt and/or inefficient or both. The freshness of new emerging leaders who do not owe any political debts to anybody enhances the public perception of their clean image and appeal. The most striking example of successful exploitation of the populace in recent times has been by billionaire Italian businessman Silvio Berlusconi who intelligently exploited the situation with the help of his media empire to promise a clean administration to the Italian masses. His new party "Forza Italia" rode into majority coalition power in Italy with Berlusconi as the PM. Ironically, Berlusconi has now lost his PM's job because of allegations of the very corruption that he had promised to eradicate, severely damaging his lustre in the public mind. However, the former PM remains a force to be reckoned with in any future elections.

Because the public broadcasting system, the TV and radio, is always under government control and churns out pro-government anti-opposition rhetoric without exception, the credibility of the propaganda does become suspect in the perception of the masses. One reaction is to turn to media with greater credibility e.g. BBC. The other reaction is to place greater reliance on a grassroots-type of word of mouth communication. In such circumstances, charismatic ideas and personalities tend to have a definitely greater influence over "the great silent majority" who yearn for something pure and simple. As long as the masses are convinced that the message is genuine and synonymous with their desires of clean, honest and responsive administration, the personality and the movement of the "saviours" that promise to redeem their prayers provide clear alternative to the system they are used to land suffer under).

This phenomenon can be labelled as a "force," "pressure group," "movement," etc. it doesn't matter, it soon develops an inherent momentum of its own, becoming a force to be reckoned with. Its initial progress is built on the underestimation of its strength and direction by those in power. its inherent strength is being the absolute opposite in the mass perception to what the public is normally used to. politics as usual with its accom-

paniment of a client-patron relationship inculcating nepotism, corruption, chicanery, fraud, looting of the public till, graft, etc. In a perverse way for those who would suppress the message of the new message

all available. Cut off from the western money and material that was flowing in during the height of the war, more and more Mujahideen groups turned to drug manufacturing and smuggling to finance their

## ASISEEIT

#### Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

bearers by fair means or foul the suppression of their message adds to their appeal.

In the Asian sub-continent, major movements influencing the electoral process in contrast to traditional political parties has been seen in India through its democratic history e.g. the untouchables, groaning under the selfish, closed upper sects of the Hindu religion is not any new phenomenon. Recently new political forces based on the reaction to the traditional parties. Congress. BJP, Janata Dal (JD), are increasingly coming into their own in the Indian heartland e.g. Bihar, UP, etc. Cutting broadly across most religious and racial lines, new back-tobasics movements have tended to become political forces to be reckoned with.

Perhaps the most spectacular display of a "third force" is in Afghanistan where feudal society, ethnic and sectarian divisions as well as dominant personalities complicated by a decades old civil war had ensured a fractured society seemingly impossible to repair.

With Mujahideen acting as feudal warlords rather than the liberators they professed to be, an adverse reaction was always on the cards. The almost bloodless revolution that has heralded the advent of the genuinely neutral Islamic Talibaan has put almost half of Afghanistan's land area to date under its sway in less than two months. By applying deeds to their rhetoric of restoring peace and tranquillity they have caught the imagination of the Afghans suffering under the highhandedness and brigandry of the different Mujahideen groups that had taken over in various local areas in the name of freedom from So-

viet tutelage. Afghans saw more destruction of their towns and cities along with civilian deaths in the last two/three years than during the entire course of the 10-year civil war. Every local armed band decided to levy toll tax on the roads and highways, the result has been inordinate rise in the price of consumer items, i.e. if they are at

survival. Internal travel was almost next to impossible in the presence of the "toll tax" for looting) imposed by these armed groups. In contrast, the advent of the Talibaan saw all

There can be no greater

these disappear like chaff.

manifestation of Afghanistan's problems than the permutations and combinations bedevilling the country because of the illiterate "General" Rashid Dostum, Uzbek warlord of Mazar-i-Sharif, who has created a mercenary force. Jumbish Milli that remained loyal to Soviet Union during the entire course of the war, changing sides only when the Russians had left and thus surviving. Even Ahmed Shah Masood, eulogised as a great anti-Soviet fighter, made separate peace with the Soviets from time to time when it suited him. Dostum and Masood became unlikely allies in "conquering" Kabul as the Communist Government disappeared in the wake of the Soviet departure, thereafter they fell apart. With the greater threat of the Talibaan looming over them, they are increasingly looking to be allies again but they offer no change to a war weary population. Already Dostum is trying to create a new reality by threatening to divide Afghanistan between that Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns whereas President Burhanuddin Rabbani seems to be opposed to it.

The Talibaan phenomenon is a welcome third force to the population because in the areas they now control they have disarmed all groups irrespective of their affiliation, opened up all the roads in their control for free travel, imposing peace and tranquillity which once seemed to be an impossible dream. Above all an atmosphere of freedom and return to family values is all-prevalent. This has caught the imagination of the broad mass of Aighans who constitute the great silent majority. The momentum of the third force is thus maintained by the perception of the great mass of populace that was fed up of the situation (and people like Rashid Dostum) and desperately desired what they now see may be coming true in the form of the Talibaan movement. One fallout has been that the UN-sponsored Mesteri initiative is bogged down and may end up in failure in the face of the Talibaan reality.

The great mass of the populace in third world countries just wants to be able to live a clean, honest life with adequate socio-economic facilities. Being generally gullible to

tend to accept at face value whatever is fed to them by the government controlled media or conversely a sophisticated propaganda by the Opposition till they reach the breaking point of teleration. As the phrase implies, they generally tend to remain silent on is sues. However, circumstances that test the limits of their patience can rouse them to anger and whenever a catalyst in the form of a personality or an idea comes along that provides them with an alternative to their system. They become vulnerable to that promise, tending to coalesce around the messenger. As history is witness, the "great silent majority" can be a potent force once aroused! One must beware of "the rage of angels."

charisma and rhetoric, they

# Buchwald's COLUMNI



### The Money Game

F you want to know who's running the world - I'll tell you who. It's a money speculator named Reister. Reister, who is popularly known as the Bauer Lac mon ster, spends his day at the Zurich Bourse buying and selling hard and soft currency. Everyone knows what he does, but no one knows how he does it. Yet Reister can affect the lives of every man, woman and child on this planet.

Here's how he operates. Suppose he wakes up in the morning with a sour stomach. Whenever Reister had a bad stomach in the past, he had the urge to buy German marks and sell American dollars.

So he kissess his wife goodby and she whispers to him. Promise me you won't buy any Mexican pesos today." Reister laughs and says," For godssakes, woman, I'm only

human." After arriving in the city Reister stops at the Golden Nestle Case for cossee. He is joined by Hegel, the broker, and says to him. "I can't talk to you for very long because I'm going to buy German Marks.

Hegel's ears go up. "What are you going to sell?" "British pounds, Spanish pesetas and American dollars."

As soon as Reister leaves for the bourse, Hegel gets on the phone and calls his brother. "Don't ask questions. Sell all our dollars and buy German Marks, Japanese yen and Greek drachmas.

Hegel's brother immediately starts dealing, and on the floor of the bourse Reister notices the dollar plunging into the sea. He is elated that his sour stomach hunch was right and others have spotted the weakness of the US currency.

It doesn't take the London, Paris or Tokyo money markets long to see what's going on. "If Switzerland is selling dollars, that means Wall Street is about to catch pneumonia," a business TV reporter from Iceland declares.

The phones are ringing in Hong Kong. "Sell dollars and buy Norwegian Krone," the dealers are shouting.

The Secretary of the US Treasury is awakened from a sound sleep and told that someone somewhere is trying to destroy the dollar. He is advised to start buying greenbacks to protect their value. The secretary calls up the Treasury's night teller and instructs him to go to the safe and withdraw a billion dollars to shore up the country's currency. Unfortunately, once the world is out concerning the Treasury 's actions, the dollar sinks even lower than before.

The worldwide money markets are rocking by this time, and nobody knows what to bet on any more. In the meantime, Reister comes home from work and sits down to a large plate

of chicken and dumplings. "What happened today?" Mrs. Reister asks.

"Nothing much. I sold a few dollars, bought some Portuguese escudos and then played chess with Hegel for the rest of the afternoon."

By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and

# Migration Scheme Stirs up Racially Divided Fiji last nail in the Fijian political,

HE racially divided South Pacific republic of Fiji has started a raging controversy by proposing to admit up to 28,000 rich Chinese business immigrants.

Cabinet approval of the scheme appears to be based on the expected need of many wealthy Hong Kong Chinese to find new homes in 1997 when the People's Republic government takes over the territory as well as Fiji's need to boost economic development.

For a non-refundable application fee of US \$30,000 plus another US \$100,000 for investment in Fiji governmentapproved projects. Hong Kong Chinese can gain residence in

the South Pacific country. The government aims to approve 7,000 investor "units" - each unit consisting of not more than four people in a family - over the next three years. The government has stated that the proposal aims to establish a special residential settlement for the Chinese - complete with schools and health centres - although it

hopes the migrants will integrate into local society.

Interest in the scheme was linked to the government's economic policy of encouraging domestic market growth and economic diversification. the statement said. If implemented, the scheme offers opportunities for economic advancement and the creation of at least 50,000 new jobs.

In the absence of further details the scheme becomes, as one resident said, "very woolly". "We're just sitting tight waiting to see what hap-

Hong Kong-based company Asia Oceanic Development is said to be promoting the scheme but Fiji's honorary consul general in Hong Kong Desmond Lee has failed to locate it. Cabinet Secretary Filimoni Jitoko told a Fijian newspaper it was possible the company was in the process of being registered. But whether it was registered or not was "of no immediate concern", he

Fiji's Indian leaders, how-

William Gasson writes from Suva

The Chinese would put the last nail in the Fijian political, social and economic coffin

ever, fail to see it that way. "It only goes to prove that the whole Chinese scheme is another racket," said a suspicious Mahendra Chaudhry, opposition Labour parliamentary leader, who wanted to know the names of the company's shareholders.

Indians, who first arrived in Fiji 115 years ago as indentured labourers for the sugar industry, make up around 45 per cent of Fiji's 740,000 population. Their domination of Fijian business created illleeling among the less commercially inclined indigenous, land-owning Fijians.

When the country's first Indian-dominated government came to power in 1987 it set off two military coups led by current Prime Minister Sitveni Rabuka. Giving Indians political, as well as commercial, domination of Fiji was totally

unacceptable to the indigenous

population. The coups restored political supremacy to indigenous Fijians and thousands of skilled Indians fled the islands. A subsequent Constitution — which is due for review in 1997 ensured that Indians would remain a political minority.

Into that recipe for racial resentment the government new wants to add a larger Chinese ingredient, the present Chinese community numbers around 4,700.

"What can the government offer the Chinese in terms of citizenship when it denies equal rights to Indians who have lived in Fiji for 115 years and contributed so much to Fiji's social and economic welfare?" Mr Chaudhry asks.

Comments on the scheme range from realism to reactionary. Bill Yee. president of the Chinese Association of Fiji. fears that any mass importation of Chinese would have serious social repercussions. "I don't think our infrastructure can sustain a rapid rise like that," he said as he anticipates that the additional population would have a negative impact on hospitals, housing and factories as well as schools and other social services.

He was disappointed that the government had not consulted the local Chinese about the proposal.

A more reactionary response to this "deadly and poisonous suggestion" came from Fijian Nationalism Party (FNP) leader Sakiasi Butadroka. He worries that, in time, Chinese immigrants would also rule over indigenous Fijians and doom them to be "labourers for the rest of their lives".

"If the sick, illiterate and enslaved Indian indentured labourers could reverse their living conditions to the Fijians in a matter of 50 and more years, the FNP is sure that these Chinese would put the

social and economic coffin in not more than 10 years of their arrival", he said. "Chinese will take our business and our jobs," complained building contractor Ambika Prasad Maharaj.

Even church leaders have written to Mr Rabuka warning of "conmen and persuasive experts" and charging that too many government officials were immature and lacking in integrity. They also express fear that the migrants could bring crime and further conflict into an already raciallydivided society

Suggested Fiji's "Daily Post" delicately: "It is prudent to be cautious in such an ambitious project.

However, fears of an imminent Chinese invasion of Fiji may be unfounded. Desmond Lee reported from Hong Kong that by early February less than 10 Hong Kong residents had enquired about the migration scheme - and they all thought it too expensive.

"Nuclear Nexus.....

second post-editorial of 18-4-

95. titled "Nuclear Nexus that

Thrives on Hypocrisy." written

by Daya Kishan Thussu, Asso-

ciate Editor of Gemini News

to ... preserve the privileges

that go with a nuclear capabil-

ity, such as a permanent seat

Britain, France and China (i.e.

4 out of a total number of 5)

secured a permanent seat on

the UN Security council, in

1945, none of them possessed

On the date that Russia,

on the UN Security Council."

"The nuclear powers want

Sir. Paragraph three of your

Depthnews Asia

#### No more Croatias and Bosnias

Sir, I read with interest the article on the former Yugoslavia published on April 6 in your paper, I was disappointed, however, by one comment that Mr Arshad-uz Zaman makes, and I sincerely hope he will reconsider. He accurately describes the tragic situation in Bosnia, which cries out for constructive efforts to bring this war to an end and bring back peace to the lives of a war-weary population.

However, there is one comment he makes that is contradictory to the spirit of the rest of the article. He states that the Croats "have had a relative easy time as a separate sovereign state." In fact, the Slovenians and the Croatians were the first victims of Serbian aggression, and it was particularly in Croatia that the Serbians perfected their genocidal, land-grabbing, terrorist tactics. Croatia was the first country to suffer ev-

erything that Bosnia is suffering right now, and a shaky cease fire continues to divide Croatia, with Serbs controlling at least 30% of the Croatian republic's territory and no guarantees for the future! This sovereign state."

is hardly having "a relatively easy time as a separate; The reason I raise the topic is not to correct an error of fact in the article. I raise the topic because the manner of presentation gives rise to the fear that there is an error of attitude which underlies this statement. In fact, when Croatia was being crucified by the Serbians, the Serbs could not fail to notice a practical indifference to their violations of

human rights and decency. There was no decisive international action to save Croatia. It was this indifference that convinced the Serbs that the world would be equally indifferent to the same tactics they are continuing to use in Bosnia. The lesson for the world is

(including those of the Croat ians) are sacred. It we limit our concern only to certain humans, then the rights of all humans are in danger. The rights of a person cannot become important to me simply because of linguistic, religious. ethnic, or ideological considerations — this is a return, in a different form, of the tribalism of a by-gone era. The rights of every person must be sacred simply because he/she too is a human like me and each person is my brother or sister. This, I am convinced, is the correct attitude if we are to avoid future Bosnias and future Croatias and to respect the rights of every individual as Concerned reader

#### Popularisation of computer centres

Sir. The BSCIC has taken a practical step with its scheme to provide loans for the openthat all human rights

mg of more computer print centres (secretariate services) in the country (Star staff report, April 24). This service by the small business persons has become popular in a society where few small offices and homes can afford to possess a personal computer; although bank loans are now available for lease of PCs. (On the other hand the telephone/fax ser vices offered by the smal shops have also become popular, but there are some grey areas in the business which have to be rectified).

The computer centres may expand in the second phase (after one to two years) and offer basic training facilities also, to cater to the office staff (computer operators) and for data entry services. An official Code of Practice has to be issued by the government to regulate these new services. and the fees may be standardised initially; later the market forces may take over. The data entry business has a big export

potential (Indian export: one billion dollars per annum!).

The BCS (Bangladesh Computer Society) may institute an Advisory Board to guide the government policy in this respect, in close coordination with the private industry (approach apex bodies like the FCCI and regional CCIs).

It is also high time that suitable seminars are held at national level to review the PC assembly industry in the country for cheap mass-production. Computer course has been made compulsory in the schools, so thousands of entry level PCs would be required during the next five years. The basic monochrome model without hard disc and windows (both optional) could be produced at a cost below Taka 20,000 (need not go for the latest high-speed models). Think PC, or pichiye

A Husnain

Dhaka

even a single nuclear weapon. Therefore, Thussu's assertion is simply misleading. The above-mentioned four obtained

Service, states:

their seats because they were the victorious great powers of the Second World War.

M A Zafar Shah Asstt Prof. Deptt Relations, DU