

Credit Disbursement

The World Bank's recent monitoring observation on credit utilisation which contains a bit of back-patting for the government because of its having performed "well" in credit disbursement in the first quarter of the fiscal 1996-97, takes the wind out of the sail of our politicians' shibboleth of what unimaginable more could have been done with enhanced foreign aid — a mere rhetorical tool, now it seems for showing people the red herring. The report tells in no uncertain terms what a phenomenon of underachievement the state executives are traditionally plagued with here and what a huge effort the government is still required to come up with to ensure ploughing in of money in the needy sectors in the most appropriate manner. Its recognition of the government's relative efficiency in fund releasing in some sectors is quite timely in the sense it has shown the lacking of its ameliorating influence in certain areas while the allusion of its satisfactory performance in certain sectors will serve as a source of inspiration to build upon the good work already done.

Strangely, the sectors have been identified in the report as wanting in credit disbursement are all professed fortes of Awami League (AL), the party in power. Long before it actually assumed the executive authority of the state following the highly and internationally certified June 12 elections, the AL had placed agriculture on top of its priority list. Even the other credit starved zone, power has also been featuring more frequently than anything else in the agenda of the AL in power. While wondering over the anomaly between what it said and what is done, one should not however, forget the brief period of time the party has had following its return to power after surviving an exile from power for twenty years and the accompanying odds.

Looking ahead with a positive frame of mind and with a fair amount of pragmatism, one cannot help thinking that political honesty and sincerity can play a pivotal role in reversing the trend. We hope, the present government led by Sheikh Hasina's AL will remain unfailingly focused to this need throughout its tenure at the office.

Police Again

If one takes the trouble of poring over the incidents of civil right being seriously violated by the guardians of law in the last couple of months, there is only one inference one can arrive at: the police for some inscrutable reasons, has gone mad in this country.

How else one explains the unscrupulous and brutal exhibition of might on a particularly thick crowd of devotees at a puja mandap in Kishoreganj which led to the most unfortunate and untimely death of a young man. Despite the variety of accounts of death as carried in the press, it is clear that without the indiscriminate latthi-charging prompted by an insane fit of impatience and temper among the members of police at that place, the situation would not have arisen where a badly mauled Biplab had to fall in the nearby pond and drown.

Biplab a degree student, was indeed a martyr of might on a day culled for the worship of goddess Kali, the symbol of might in Hindu divinity. Unfortunately, on the day of Shakti puja it was shakti misspent.

Police behaviour of late has resembled the proverbial March hare madness. Despite widely publicised police excesses and wrongs in the recent times, the Ministry of Home Affairs has hardly come up with any measures indicative of reforming the members of the law enforcing agency. The death of Biplab last Monday is yet another instance of police atrocity.

No amount of rhetoric would bring Biplab back. Let it be the last incident in the already long list of irreparable losses due to law enforcers' violence. Police must sink its image of men dressed in little brief authority and rise to its formative rationale of being the protector of the good and the punisher of the bad.

More Support for DAB

There can be only one real way of expressing solidarity with the World Diabetic Day, that is by extending greater support to Diabetic Association of Bangladesh (DAB) and to all its branches to more effectively carry out their mission. The DAB, founded by the visionary Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim, has done a very commendable job so far. Yet, according to DAB, only two per cent of the total diabetic patients of a total of 20 to 25 lakh are served by them. At the Ibrahim Memorial Hospital at Dhaka, and in its 39 branches only 1.5 to 2 lakh sufferers can be treated.

The task before us is therefore obvious. We must help DAB in every way possible to extend its services throughout the country. We know that there are many expansion plans that are awaiting government approval and requisite funding. We urge the government to give DAB its most urgent attention and help it to set in motion a nation wide campaign against diabetes. There are many reasons why the government should lend it a helping hand. DAB does most of its work on its own. It is the most successful example of private initiative making a major contribution in the public health area. With just a little help from the government, mostly in terms of policy support, timely permission and some subvention, DAB has set up a stunning example of how community leaders can come together to assist the nation on such a vital area as public health. It has also been able to bring together an impressive number of people from various professions to work together on a voluntary basis for this purpose. Both in terms of setting an example of community participation, and in terms of running an organisation efficiently and cost-effectively, DAB has created an example that we all can be proud of. Let us give it all the support that it so richly deserves.

It was perhaps inevitable that with the change of government, the university campuses will experience a period of unease. There were two very strong reasons to lend support to this apprehension. One had to do with the incumbent vice-chancellor, the other was related to the halls of residence. I am not suggesting that all the troubles one finds in the universities often beset with can be traced down to the two areas suggested above. Far from it. There are other problems that are local. But these two are common.

First the vice-chancellors. They are a vulnerable lot, and have been so for quite some time. Way back, in the early sixties, Dr Mahmud Husain had to go because a powerful lobby within the university was busy working for his removal. Mahmud Husain, brother of Dr Zakir Husain, was tall person, both physically and intellectually. There was something noble — I was going to say patriotic — about him. His very nobility made him vulnerable. He would have nothing to do, nor would he understand, the machinations of those who, under the garb of their academic gown, would conceal their selfish thoughts. These busy bodies had already chosen their leader, Dr M O Ghani, who was only too anxious to occupy the seat. The procedure was simple — the wish of the governor in his capacity as the chancellor.

Dr Mahmud Husain's was a typical case, yet not fully typical. It was typical in so far as it

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illustrates the role of a lobby working for a change. Also in so far as it illustrates the selfish nature of the move. In this case the vice-chancellor was too high-minded for a set of people pursuing their low interests. In a university situation, these usually are related to gaining control of the Syndicate and through the Syndicate, the administrative machinery.

Academically, and otherwise, Dr Ghani had all the essential qualities one expects of a vice-chancellor. He was a moral, lofty person that characterised his illustrious predecessor. And when he began playing a subservient role to a notoriously political governor, he lost all credibility as a vice-chancellor.

There is a point to note in this first case of the induction of a vice-chancellor in a slightly questionable way, i.e. through the initiative of a group of teachers who soon develop their political connections to ensure that the message reaches the governor or the prime minister, as the case may be.

I cite this case because what is happening now in some of our universities is not much different: a lobby within a uni-

versity with-drawing its support from a sitting vice-chancellor, and doing every-thing possible without any regard to academic propriety simply to hasten a change. It may be that the move in a particular case to get rid of a sitting vice-chancellor has only the best of motives behind it. This appears to be the case at BUET, as far as one can judge from a distance. We have to remember that, since the

operate on the principle of keeping their supporters happy, and at the same time, of keeping the opposition at bay. Whether the principle will be followed without hurting the basic decency and without a gross violation of administrative norms, or in complete disregard of these norms, will depend on the individual. A common criticism one hears these days is that vice-chancellors

cause of all our trouble on the campus. Sooner or later, the universities, as they grow in size, find the problem of accommodation as one which defies an easy solution. The race between the number of admissions and the number of available seats is unequal. Much of the tension on the campus is centred round this problem. By a curious combination of factors, it has finally given rise to what may be called the battle of halls. A particular group of students gains control of a particular hall — the means employed are not clear to me, and then decides the fate of new entrants. The new entrants must somehow get their passport from the dominating group. And if they do not already come with right credentials, they must at least pledge their active support to the group in all future occasions — like joining a procession and casting their votes for party candidates. If the new entrant is politically uninvolved yet, a quick rite of initiation follows and as often as not, one who came as a student soon matures into a cadre, or at the least a camp follower. A hall of residence in our universities has become a citadel of a few student

leaders. They enjoy a special status — best room, free food a salute of the staff — and all this under the very nose of the hall administration. If the Provost and the House Tutors belong to the same hierarchy of which the vice-chancellor is the apex and if there is a secret or not-so-secret bond between the hall administration and the student leaders, and if, things being so, the hall is used as a sanctuary by criminals, — some students and the rest outsiders, — then what we get is a hall of residence in the present shape. The picture is the same in almost all our campuses, with some variation here and there. It looks as if our universities have become so many scenes of a relentless power game. Teachers and students have their separate fields, and the halls are reserved for the students.

The bloody clashes taking place between groups of warring students, as if by rotation on all our campuses, show no signs of abatement. The latest clash on the BAU campus is but one more incident in a series of incidents which started in the worst days of autocracy. In those days, sometimes we could see the hand of the government behind the clashes. Today, the political sky is much clearer and naturally enough people expect an end of all violence. The campuses pose a challenge for the government. The nation and the wider world will pass their judgment on the government from their view of the situation on our university campuses.

PASSING CLOUDS
Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

days of Dr Mahmud Husain, we have become used to seeing vice-chancellors being appointed in a manner in which their possible, or known or suspected, political inclinations are matters of vital concern for the government. One is not surprised, since the quality and nature of the government, during these three and a half decades, have changed, and changed in a manner that bodes no good for universities. Enlightened disinterestedness has yielded ground to a miscegenated political interest. Vice chancellors chosen on political considerations have to

who meet the political criterion almost in variably fail to meet the other criteria. Their dependence on political support, not necessarily from political quarters only, but also from the beneficiaries of their administration, is also their Achilles' heel. Any political change at the national level is bad news for them and they may well expect the pent up feelings of the opposition to come out in the open and to clamour for a change.

Next, let me consider the second factor, the halls of residence that has become a potent

densely populated area in the world is short of habitable and farmlands. We would like to develop an infrastructure facility to attract foreign investment for the expansion of economic activity in the country. With increased investment, exports will pick up and it is not impossible to achieve the projected GDP growth rate of 7 per cent soon. Besides there is a long-drawn separatist movement in some north-eastern Indian states and there is a risk that in an emergency situation India may use the transit corridor to send troops arms and military supplies to suppress the movement. Thus unwittingly we may be sucked into an internal problem of India and accused of becoming an accomplice in abetting the military campaign against the separatists. It is not the hadia corridor through Bangladesh but the proposed Asian Highway in our region connecting India, Bangladesh with Myanmar via

tance and needs no micro management but deserves a serious approach, examination and a commonsense policy as it is a one national agenda which should not be treated as plain field in which to two teams of politicians are pitted against each other.

Before taking a decision, the government will have to confront the issue head on and evaluate the short-term gain if any and the long-term consequences of the deal and determine if it serves the best interest of the country. Without being swamped by tired mantras that transit deal will bring rich dividends by earning revenue the question we should ask is, 'do we have a shared common interest? Is the benefit worth its cost?' Finance Minister SAMS Kibria who has the impeccable credentials of knowledge of the dynamics and asymmetry of India-Bangladesh relations and the imperatives of regional and international economics as a former Foreign Secretary and the head of ESCAP for over a decade is perhaps best qualified to give correct and prudent advice to Prime Minister Hasina on this deeply contentious issue. Had Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, undisputedly the greatest nationalist the country has ever produced, been alive today he would certainly have rejected the proposal out of hand or else soon after independence he would not have asked for Indian troops pullout from the soil of Bangladesh, canceled the border trade agreement with India to check smuggling or rushed to Lahore to attend the Islamic Summit. Her father's daughter, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina cannot be different. What is clear is that any transit deal with India may not be the most shrewd political and business decision.

The writer is former press counsellor, Bangladesh Mission to the UN, New York.

Fools Rush in Where Angels Fear to Tread

by Abdul Hannan

ALTHOUGH categorically denied by the Indian Foreign Minister I.K. Gujral during his recent visit to Dhaka, India by all indications is asking for the right of transit facilities through Bangladesh to send Indian goods and commodities to its north-eastern states popularly known as seven sisters — Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram and Nagaland as a quid pro quo for agreement on sharing of Ganges water with Bangladesh. This is confirmed by Indian press reports. The renowned Indian columnist Kuldeep Nayyar in an article published recently in the Indian news magazine Mainstream said that the agreement on Ganges water will certainly materialise only as a reciprocal arrangement on the question of transit. There will be a spirit of give and take which our Foreign Secretary perceived during his recent visit, he disclosed. Strongly advocating a water-sharing agreement with Bangladesh, Nayyar said, 'in return India will get facilities to use the Bangladesh territory including the Chittagong Port to handle its goods and men to north-east.'

Linked or not the issue of transit raised by India has been a subject of intensive debate by the media, seminars, intelligentsia and politicians of all persuasion here. One thing is clear. The nation is divided on the issue. The danger is that in the welter of confused noises and conflicting views the issue may lose clarity of vision. Yet the matter is urgent and of crucial national importance as the interests of nations are best served by decisions taken on foreign policy by cool and dispassionate appraisal of objective reality and not partisan sentiments.

Many favour giving transit facility on grounds of economic gains by way of earning revenue and cite examples of transit facilities in different parts of the world for economic integration of nations. True example of harmony and close political and economic cooperation about in other parts of the world. NATO is welcoming into its fold former enemies like Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland. European Union is moving towards a single currency by 1999 according to the Maastricht treaty. There is NAFTA, North American Free Trade Agreement between Canada, United States and Mexico, the six-ASEAN countries have welcomed Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Burma.

After the fall of communism and collapse of the Soviet empire, Europe has dismantled the Berlin Wall. But what is different there is that a country seeking transit facility through another country does not transgress or violate accepted norms of good neighbourly relation or consistently renege on agreements with that country giving rise to lack of credibility and crisis of confidence. Unfortunately, the relation-

ship between India and Bangladesh has not always been cordial and friendly. The wall of distrust and suspicion between the two countries is largely the creation of India. The problem of Ganges water-sharing is too well-known to bear repetition. India has continued to divert waters at Farakka unilaterally without any agreement reducing the northern parts of the Bangladesh into a dry and arid desert and has caused incalculable economic and ecological devastation. Similarly, the Talpotti islands although clearly within the maritime boundary of Bangladesh from the Hariavanga river stream was claimed by India in 1981 and they landed troops, set up communication aerial and moved 74 frigate INM Andamans towards the island. Bangladesh could not do anything except wringing its hands and looking the other way in order to avoid a stand off. Later in July 1981 Indira Gandhi asserted that the island was an undisputed Indian territory.

Again, Tinbigha corridor issue is a brazen example of recalcitrant India reluctant to honour its agreements with its neighbour. In 1974, prime ministers of India and Bangladesh in a joint statement signed a joint boundary agreement allowing perpetual lease of Tinbigha corridor of the size of a football ground to Bangladesh to connect with Bangladesh enclaves of Angorpotta and Dahagram in exchange of South Beruberi enclave to India. Bangladesh quickly implemented the agreement which later was incorporated in the Constitution as an amendment but Indian implementation of the agreement was never forthcoming on one plea or another, thus keeping the two enclave completely cut off from the rest of the country. Later in October 1982 an agreement signed between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and General Ershad allowing Chief Martial Law Administrator of Bangladesh while retaining Indian sovereignty over Tinbigha provided for allowing unrestricted movement of Bangladesh military, paramilitary, police, civilians and goods and services through Tinbigha. But again India backtracked.

After 20 years what we now have is a mutilated version of the agreement allowing passage of goods and people through the Tinbigha corridor for only four daylight hours everyday under the glare of search lights and rigorous scrutiny of identity cards by Indian police checkpoints causing hardship to the inhabitants of enclaves. The lease in perpetuity of Tinbigha corridor to Bangladesh is now a distant memory.

The litany of unfriendly acts by India does not end there. reduced tariff to 30 per cent India has not given access to its market of Bangladesh products by pairing down tariff barriers. No wonder, on the question of transit, there is hesitation in entering into a fresh deal with a partner with a track record of such dismal performance and suspect credentials.

India wants transit facility through Bangla, Dorshona, Birol, Shabazpur, Karimganj and Siliguri to Assam and Meghalaya. India's transport target is Chittagong Port from where they would like to send their goods by road to Tripura, Nagaland and Assam. Those who are infatuated with the idea that transit will bring economic gain to Bangladesh and help develop physical infrastructure such as roads, railways and ports in Bangladesh betray a mendicant attitude, lack national pride and are naive and short sighted and suffer from flawed perception. Offering transit facility to India will put heavy burden on Bangladesh. Salman F Rahman after leading a trade delegation to Assam and Meghalaya recently spoke about the huge potential of trade and investment with the north-eastern states. By encouraging transit facilities to India Bangladesh would in effect lose the opportunity of marketing its manufactured products and other commodities to these states of India. If India allowed a fraction of its north-eastern market to Bangladesh we could vastly improve our balance of trade with India and would not have to think of earning \$75 million a year by giving India a land corridor through the heartland of Bangladesh.

Those who argue that SAPTA provides for transit facility to India is mistaken.

cost of colossal amount of public money without any consideration of the abject poverty and socio-economic suffering of our people despite the fact that a huge number of our Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials are posted abroad.

We would appreciate if the present government which kindly issues a monthly statement of expenditure on foreign official tours of our ministers, MPs and bureaucrats through press releases for the sake of accountability and transparency, efficiency and financial discipline in the works and functions of our people's government.

Would our Ministry of Finance kindly take necessary action?

OH Kabir
6, Hare Street
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wherever they like feeling that they can do so because the authorities do not provide adequate parking space. But one has to make it clear that if designated parking spaces are not available they simply should drive on and find one — in their own garages and homes if needs be.

Mizanur Rahman
Banani

Foreign tours

Sir, There are so many things wrong with this world-class city of ours that it really would be sensible for those in charge to take them one at a time.

I'm sure we don't want a world-class city overnight, but we would be immensely grateful for gradual resolution of our problems. Take illegal parking, for example. Why DCC cannot does have a team of traffic wardens dispensing tickets reasonable at punitive rates. I can imagine the considerable legions who park their cars

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Standardisation

Sir, Bangladesh has observed 27th World Standards Day on 14th October '96 through newspaper supplements, meetings and seminars. Unfortunately I am still in a fix about the two brands of liquid milk as sold in the retail shops of Dhaka. The Savar Dairy Milk sells at Tk 8 for a half-litre packet against Tk 12 for a half-litre one of Milk Vita. Both the two dairies are owned by the government of Bangladesh and thus it is questionable how the price should be so much different. Milk is a natural product and thus there is no reason for such wide variation except in case the butter or fat is removed in varied percentages. Let the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution do publish the nutritional value of each brand of milk so that consumers may choose based on technical comparative data alone!

Ahmedul Alam
14, Eskatan Gardens
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World-class city

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OPINION
What Are We Doing to Protect Ourselves?

M Ehsanur Rahman

While looking through different shelves in a bookshop at the Heathrow Airport I found there are guidebooks and other information materials from many countries. Unfortunately, there is nothing about Bangladesh, nor anything about Bangla, our national language, for which we had to pay in terms of life and blood. It reminded me the appeal made by one expatriate at Dhaka last year. According to him, 'With the enormous potentiality and treasure, Bangla unfortunately remains a language of very limited population of world'. I still recollect, in his one-hour long presentation, Dr. William Radice from UK outlined the current exposure of Bangla to the non-Bangla speaking people and the scope of learning Bangla by an expatriate. He also made a brief presentation of his book, written specially with the theme of teaching and learning Bangla. This book, with step by step guidelines for learning Bangla, became a widely-circulated book reportedly 30 million copies sold so far.

Mr Radice also summarised five major points of learning, which seem to be common for all standard language teaching, and are equally applicable for Bangla. These are: i) context of language be given importance; ii) varieties of different practical needs be essentially reflected; iii) reading should be enjoyable and interesting with humour; iv) equal emphasis on reading speaking and writing to develop a sound foundation; v) use of language at different situations or fields.

For professionals who work on or for language, I think there are enough to think that there is need for extensive efforts to make the scope of learning Bangla as a sophisticated language wider, especially by the expatriates many of whom come to Bangladesh and work for long time.