

## CBAs in Banks

To say it is alarming would be gross understatement of fact. Indeed the situation has worsened from cancer to cancer spreading all over the nationalised banking sector including the Bangladesh Bank at the top. The sad irony is we have allowed it to be enacted unchecked in modern times far removed from the wild west days in America where desperadoes ruled by crooked eyebrows at the township centre having had ordinary citizens shrivel into vegetative indifference at their homes.

Our scoop on the task force findings into CBA do-as-you-please at the NCBs, likely to be submitted to the government next month, unravel how 25 per cent of the bank employees with trade union labels have become complete sinecures—drawing salaries without an iota of work.

This *nawabi* (overlordship) eclat whose economic cost can be easily quantified comes in with physical occupation rights enjoyed with sardonic smile spread across huge office spaces together with use of chauffeur-driven transports. Those make for some cost really! Nothing is left in doubt as to who is at the mercy of whom, who calls the shots regarding postings and transfers and who might try to bend rules to suit their selfish or clannish ends.

If the CBA command were unified it could have been better understood as a bargaining agent in the professional sense and even otherwise the damage would have been less than what the institutions suffer on account of unabated rival trade unionism in most of them. They feed, in a muscular sense, on the patronage they can so easily get from the political parties who pamper them both in and out of power deeming it as an useful investment. From the other side it is the *bhai-bhai* intimacy beamed on and off.

Labour reform has remained long overdue. We are supremely concerned over the way a long-felt need for it has gone by default only to let the wrong kind of CBAs enjoy fresh leases of life. Financial sector reform cannot be extricated from trade union reform. We are desperate to see some action now.

## Highway Anarchy

Tora bridge at Manikganj in the Dhaka Aricha route wore a turbulent look Tuesday afternoon. Altercation between toll collectors and bus drivers and conductors led to a reign of anarchy lasting some three hours causing great traffic disruption and sufferings to people. One Bangla daily offered a vivid clue to the sufferings of the passengers as it put out the photo of one man offering his prayer in the middle of the road.

What made the hell break loose? Would you believe it? One taka only. Reportedly toll collectors demanded Taka 20 instead of 19 from a bus driver. This led to argument followed by altercation and brawl in which the driver got roughed up. Angered at this fate of one of their peers bus drivers who outnumbered their rivals took control of the area. They set the toll outposts ablaze and brought traffic to complete standstill by their nowadays usual practice of pulling up the vehicles all over.

Traffic resumed following police intervention but it was not before good three hours of mob frenzy that had gripped the whole place in a state of panic and disorder. Our question is why police always arrives so late in every spot of trouble. The times have changed. Police today is far better equipped to network among themselves than anytime in the past. At least it should not be missed in important arterial joints like Manikganj, places that almost regularly feature as being vulnerable to highway anarchy. Not many days have passed since the skirmish between students of Jahangirnagar University and transport workers which threw the vital road on the national highway off gear.

We feel there should be sufficient police patrol in these areas. More importantly, police that will be able to act effectively before mob violence like the Tuesday's one could erupt. The fact that as a nation we have no vision or conviction in development becomes clear in these incidents of flare-ups. Do the authorities ever think how many hours are eaten away from our productivity through these pointless skirmishes? Which other country in the civilised world has the experience of such frequent and utterly futile tradition of internecine fighting?

## Admirable Dulu Mian

Dulu Mian is an ordinary soul. Far less privileged than Anjan Dutta's *Haripada kerani* when it comes to acquaintance with events of extraordinary imaginings. But this insignificant person whose professional identity is a peon of Land Mortgage Bank in Pabna recently demonstrated a streak of honesty that should do many of his so-called professional and social superiors proud.

Having gone to encash a cheque of Taka 4000, Dulu Mian found that the local Janata Bank employee had given, inadvertently of course, Taka 40,000—a good 36 thousand more than the cheque he submitted was for. Had Dulu Mian walked away with the extra 36 thousand there would have been none to stop him. The man who had paid the amount obviously wouldn't have any clue to this statistical disaster before the day's end. But Dulu Mian did not take advantage of this. In a rare display of moral restraint, something almost every Conradian novel is so unmistakably redolent of, he returned the extra 36 thousand taka to the officer. Dulu Mian did not do it to be commended or rewarded. He did it from an innate sense of honesty, from the guidance of his conscience. In a country that is about to be in the red from rampant fraudulence by members of every section and profession, most notably by its educated elites, Dulu Mian is one pole star of defiance and assurance. It is because Dulu Mians come up from here and there every now and then, that life still appears livable and all does not seem lost yet.

Live on Dulu Mian. Leave your legacy among those who will live after you.

THE one-day business summit of the prime ministers of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh that took place in Dhaka on the 15th of this month has been acclaimed by all as a step in the right direction. The government of Sheikh Hasina is to be commended for the initiative. The ready acceptance of her counterparts to attend the summit a couple of months ago which had to be postponed due specially to serious political developments in Pakistan testifies to the sincere interest evinced by them in this venture. Even the leader of opposition in Bangladesh Parliament, Begum Zia, did not hesitate to come out in the open to urge both India and Pakistan to invest more in and enhance trade with Bangladesh.

Ostensibly, the declared objective of the summit was to explore ways and means to increase cooperation in the fields of investment, trade, joint venture projects, communication, energy and a host of other sectors. This was to be achieved through exchange of ideas, collection of useful data and exploratory discussions among members of the high-powered business delegations representing the three participating countries. The fact that the business magnates accompanying the Heads of Government of

the two neighbouring countries were brought to meet their counterparts in Bangladesh represented a sincere and deliberate policy of all the three countries to reinforce their total commitment to and abiding support for their endeavour.

In effect, the achievements of the summit has been more than what meets one's eye. Besides the initiative of generating material benefits through mutual cooperation, the Dhaka parley manifested a desire of these three large nations, especially the two long feuding arch-rivals of the sub-continent to create an atmosphere congenial to the establishment of the much-needed healthy and vibrant relations through resolution of outstanding issues. Despite some references and perhaps behind the scene attempts to touch on 'other' problems, which could not be placed on the agreed agenda the conference provided a welcome forum for the leaders to meet and understand each other's position on various issues. It is a common knowledge that doors for effective resolution of highly sensitive and important

issues could be opened only by leadership at the apex. Any attempt by lesser leaders and high officials would only lead people to move in a circle, each side striving to score a point over the other in a prolonged and acrimonious debate.

The exercise was carried out in true SAARC spirit of cooper-

erisation, agreement of SAFTA and as per the latest decision taken by the SAARC summit at male to establish a free trade zone in the region by the year 2001 under the banner of SAFTA.

Although the intent and purpose of the three leaders to intensify and speed up cooperation among them in certain designated sectors are the most noble one can think of, how much of the pronouncements of hopes and aspirations about fulfilment of these wishes one could expect appears a different question altogether.

The financial world is less difficult to achieve. What is more arduous and less pragmatic is to modify the inherent character and to enhance the flow of goods from one country to the other, on an equitable basis, within the brief stipulated period.

Between Pakistan and India the main obstacles to forging desirable ties of all round economic and commercial cooperation are principally the lack of mutual trust, absence of a long lost tradition and certain physical barriers, etc. Between Bangladesh and Pakistan the greatest shortcoming is not one of lack of will but principally non-availability of cheap and speedy means of transport. The emphasis, therefore, lay in the need for building communication infrastructure of sea, air and land transport. Transportation of goods between Pakistan and Bangladesh through land route over India, despite availability of suitable road network, is yet to be approved by India.

To attain a better quantum and optimum flow of trade between India and Bangladesh, indeed, warrant a very careful

and in-depth planning, investigating, facilitating, rectifying and, finally, monitoring the progress of desired actions in this regard. The colossal imbalance of trade of Bangladesh with India prevailing at present has been increasing, and appropriate measures are called for urgently to rectify this imbalance. The more vicious is the ever-growing volume of smuggling across the borders which not only has become more widespread but firmly institutionalised. The consequence is the continuing adverse impact of this illegal trade, which may come close to double the volume of the legal trade, on Bangladesh industry, particularly on small and medium scale industries, is both serious and overwhelming.

The situation, however, is not that hopeless, as it apparently looks to be. In free trade groups, like in European Union, special measures are undertaken by way of subsidising poor and less competitive sectors of a member country out of a common fund established by contributions from relatively well-to-do member countries. Well-devised, well-tested and pragmatic measures are, therefore, imperative for the success of the policy and realisation of hopes of our leaders expressed in Dhaka a week ago.

# A Right but Ambitious Step Forward

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## Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

ation and identified the important sectors on which SAARC itself has made significant, though varying progress. Cooperation among member countries, such as the present three, is indeed duly envisaged under SAARC charter. Positive reference was made by the leaders to the need for expediting implementation of measures being undertaken under the trade lib-

eration among them in certain designated sectors are the most noble one can think of, how much of the pronouncements of hopes and aspirations about fulfilment of these wishes one could expect appears a different question altogether. The removal of physical, technical and administrative barriers in order to facilitate trade in the region within the given time frame.

## Strangers When We Meet

*Unencumbered by the baggage of yesteryear, Mian Nawaz Sharif candidly stated that 'the history of the region would have been different had the mandate of the 1970 elections been accepted.'*

and commodities, only land access can give India the chance to exploit the opportunities that this vast hinterland offers. Bangladesh also can benefit by getting its tea and jute products into Central Asia but only in a limited basis, relative to India. India can export almost anything to the countries on its periphery in South Asia while importing nothing in return. Pakistan will only benefit by making some toll tax for the use of its communications infra-structure, the traffic will far exceed the costs. With the making of the Islamabad-Peshawar Motorway, the Indians would be looking forward with glee to a Delhi-Dushanbe link-up. Since we stand to lose in free trade with India, the only bargaining chip we have in solving a number of problems between us, particularly the Kashmir issue, is the land access, that must be spelled out to India. While Bangladesh is certainly justified in seeking a no-tariff regime for its products vis-a-vis the rest of South Asia, Pakistan's economic security will be compromised by free trade with India. As such, what Pakistan can propose to Bangladesh is a bi-lateral free trade on a no-tariff status be-

tween Pakistan and Bangladesh, giving Bangladesh tea and jute goods access to the Pakistani market in return for a wide range of Pakistani products led by raw cotton, textiles, etc. A SUMMIT should have really been between Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, three countries that can trade equitably without being overwhelmed by each

presence of the PM and the Pakistan delegation.

Pakistan has been very

simplicistic in its relations with Bangladesh. Prior to 1975, we had exceedingly bad relations.

On the assassination of

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, we

were among the first to recognise

the short-lived Khandhar

Mushtaq Ahmad's Republic of

Bangladesh. Our relations came

on an even keel with the advent of late Maj Gen Ziaur Rahman as President and CMLA in

1977. However his 'freedom fighter' stigma as being anti-Pakistan stuck till 'repatriation' (a term denoting those who did not rebel in 1971 and were repatriated from Pakistan in 1974) Lt Gen HM Ershad took

over after his assassination,

this despite the excellent personal rapport between late Gen Ziaur Rahman and his

Bangladeshi counterpart.

Through the 80s Ershad

maintained the love-fest with

Pakistan, within the parameters

that would not offend India.

With Begum Khaleda Zia, who followed Ershad's downfall, Pakistan had a far better rapport than with her late husband! Thus it was to Pakistan's disappointment to see Sheikh Hasina overcome both Khaleda Zia and Ershad in the 1996 elections. Since Ms Benazir tended to ignore all countries of South Asia (and indeed the third world) except India, relations remained stagnant, rather they deteriorated.

With the incumbency of Mian Nawaz Sharif as PM in Pakistan, a sea-change came into Pakistani relations with

## AS I SEE IT

**Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi**

other, which is the only one-way prospect if one allows free trade with India.

There is no doubt that there is a far greater maturity in the Pakistani handling of an Awami League (AL) government in Bangladesh. Historically we have had an automatic antipathy for the Awami League and it was believed that it was mutual for Pakistan. The Bangladeshi PM seems to have separated from historical bias in striking up a genuine rap-

erotic. That rapprochement is a major plus point. Clearly seeking Pakistan as a partner in economic and cultural cooperation. Whatever exchanges that took place between Mian Nawaz Sharif and Sheikh Hasina, she seems to accept that it is sincere and is reflected in the tinge down, or rather complete elimination, of her earlier anti-Pakistani

an old lady whom were quite unsatisfied with their sons' lack of care. Maybe there are hundreds of examples as such scattered around in our society as well. But why take sides doctor? Do you really think that the daughters are angels too? Pity, then you don't even know half the story. No Dr. Rashid, neither a boy nor a girl is a either saint or devil. It is true, as you mentioned, that these days girls get more of a chance to get jobs because of NGOs and garments industries rather than boys. But then how can you tell that girls do not take bribes, as you clearly mentioned?

Maybe you ought to go to the BRTA where women are quite openly taking bribes. Men normally protest, but in front of this quite un-feminine way of bribe asking—the men become quite taken aback. When women steal they are the smartest and the safest. Because they have loads of places to stash them and know all the tricks in the book so that they avoid getting caught. Yes, they are sincere, but they are also the ones who can spread the most vicious rumours as well. They are not always regular too, because they come up with the most absurd and mind-boggling diseases which defy all the norms of medical science.

I don't believe that girls love their parents more than boys. I believe that education and a proper exposure of a healthy society will teach any boy or girl to be more society conscious and ideal citizens. Depending on how you treat children, how you bring them up and how you impose responsibility upon them are the only key factors in determining how a boy or a girl would behave in the real world under any circumstances.

Masroor Ahmed Deepak, Dhaka

## OPINION

### Bangla-Pak Relations

Alif Zabr

Mr Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister of Pakistan is being widely quoted in the international media for his reported statement in Dhaka recently that in 1970, after the general election, the majority party should have been allowed to form the central government in Islamabad. This move might have averted the break up of Pakistan.

It is a significant and unusual political gesture from Pakistan after 26 years, and coming as it does from a prime minister, it may be taken in the spirit it is offered. For regional cooperation to be activated in a positive and practical way, the attitude of hibernation has to go.

South Asia has a twin problem, that between India and Pakistan, and between Bangladesh and Pakistan. One resulted from the partition of British India, and the other from the break up of Pakistan one generation later. The present generation's perspective is historical in all the three countries. Therefore the old political leaders who are still active have to take into account the motivation and sentiment of the current generation while formulating the international relations.

Now the question is how Bangladesh is going to reciprocate to this gesture from Pakistan, which appears to be a message of goodwill. The Muslim greeting is 'salam...', which means peace. Any other stance is unstable, and needs extra energy for maintenance, especially in the under-developed countries.

Looking at the regional background, India has to realise that she is the 'big brother' (that is how it reads in English!). This imaginary wall of seeming insecurity has to be changed in the smaller neighbours, otherwise the breaking of the ice cannot take place. The ball is in the court of India. Mr Gujral, the Indian Prime Minister, sounded friendly and hopeful. The business groups at the Dhaka meet are eager to show some results within the region.

The politicians and the business men have good internal relationships, but, in the developing countries, they seem to lack empathy at the international level. The gestation period of this summit will be watched with great interest. The influence of the private sector on politics at the national level is due for a reappraisal in this changing world. How we step dance into the next century depends on the tune the people would like to hear.

PM Sheikh Hasina appears to have set into motion more than emotion.

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