

CBAs in Banks

To say it is alarming would be gross understatement of fact. Indeed the situation has worsened from canker 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 clanish 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 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, specially 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

Three-nation Business Summit

A Right but Ambitious Step Forward

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.

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 cooperation.

eralisation 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 removal of physical, technical and administrative barriers in order to facilitate trade in the region within the given time frame-

work 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 as much as it is possible to. 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 from 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.



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."

between 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 simplistic 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 Khandkar 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 "repatriate" (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 Ziaul Haq of Pakistan and his Bangladesh 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 overtake 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

Bangladesh. During the Extraordinary OIC Summit in Pakistan in March, barely weeks after taking over in February 1997 he made a special effort vis-a-vis the Bangladesh PM. 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." Our bureaucratic tendency is to normally have a simplistic attitude that if a person is not pro-Pakistani he must be pro-Indian whereas we try our level best to project Pakistanis as anti-Indians. Mian Nawaz Sharif's very visible sincerity has disarmed the Awami League government and made them take another hard look at their available options.

Perhaps the greatest indication of things to come came from Tofael Ahmed, Commerce Minister of Bangladesh. How could they talk about linkages and associations, he stated, when the Indians do not allow the recently inaugurated Bangladesh-Nepal truck link to traverse the measly 10 miles of Indian territory? That about sums up the present state of projected commercial relations in South Asia. In the present circumstances, whatever one may try one initiate, they will all founder at the doorstep of India. A day may well come that because of this myopic self-centered policy South Asians may well be "strangers when we meet".

The author, who was in the delegation with PM Nawaz Sharif, gives his impression on the recently held Three-Nation Business Summit in Dhaka

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 Bangladesh PM seems to have separated from historical bias in striking up a genuine rap-

port with the Pakistani PM and this is apparent in sincerely 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 tone down, or rather complete elimination, of her earlier anti-Pakistani rhetoric. That rapprochement is a major plus point. Clearly the Pakistan PM is in his elements in dealing with Sheikh Hasina. The PM came across as an assured national leader ready to fob off diplomatic lobs with confidence and without rancour. The state visit following the three-nation summit was a marked success but the icing on the cake was the obliteration of India in the second final of the Jubilee Cricket Cup on January 16, 1998 in the

To the Editor...

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.

CHT and the stand of Opposition

Sir, The peace pact on the CHT which has been signed on the December 2, '97 between the government in power and the FICSS aimed at to end the decades-long bush war in the CHT. At present, the major opposition party BNP and its seven other allies are active to create disturbance in CHT. They demand the cancellation of the accord dubbing it as "black pact". They already declared that the vigorous anti-peace pact movement to be launched after Ramadan. The peace-loving Jumma people are feeling insecure as an alarming situation is prevailing in the CHT.

I think, the peace pact is not their prime object, the prime object is to create unrest in the CHT. I, therefore would like to know from the opposition political parties whether they expect further brutal massacre in CHT, like the Komalpati massacre at Kaayakali in Rangamati District and the Logong massacre at Logong in Khagrachari District. The said brutal massacres took place at the time of BNP. So, I should say to the opposition political parties to refrain from anti-peace activities.

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Meeting of the "three"

Sir, We welcome the business summit of the heads of the government, Prime Minister I K Gujral of India, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh and wish them all success.

Bangladesh's relations both with India and Pakistan are excellent and pleasant. But India's relation with Pakistan is not congenial.

The aim and objective of the business summit in Dhaka was to establish stronger and fruitful ties among the three nations of the subcontinent.

We strongly believe that since Bangladesh maintains good relations both with India and Pakistan, we can play a

very important role in mediating the differences between New Delhi and Islamabad and we all three countries India, Pakistan and Bangladesh can work together hand in hand for the welfare and prosperity of over one billion people and maintenance of democracy, peace human rights in the subcontinent.

We would request our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to kindly use her good offices for this noble cause.

O H Kabir
6, Hare Street, Wari, Dhaka-1203.

"Was it really cricket?"

Sir, An article written by Ms. Almas Zakiuddin on Tuesday, the 22nd of January titled "Was it really cricket?" was written in very bad taste. She is clearly a person who has no idea about the rules and regulations of cricket as can be seen from the fact that she claimed that the batsmen had all the rights to determine whether the match should go on or not. This statement is clearly false as it is completely up to the umpire's discretion about the fate of any match let alone this. She is clearly a Pakistani supporter and furthermore has not verified her claims because both the captains of the two teams concerned, stated that the umpires had just gone to consult with the referee. This is further proven by the fact that the balls were still on when the umpires left. One would also request Ms. Zakiuddin to check her facts before writing such articles which are quite obviously meaningless.

SM
Dhaka

UN/US-Iraq animosity again

Sir, Animosity between Iraq and UN/US has again flared up regarding composition of UN weapon inspection team in Iraq. I do not understand why there should be preponderance of US and British citizen in the weapon inspection team when

these countries have extremely bad relation with Iraq. I do not know why Mr Kofi Annan, the UN secretary-general has selected majority members from the US and the UK, when he could easily select experts from other countries having no bad relations with Iraq. There is no dearth of weapon experts even in the South Asian subcontinent. I feel that UN is failing in this regard and Iraq has a genuine grievance here.

US is talking of military option to force Iraq. This is unfortunate. Iraq is not the only country which has weapons or which has made war or violated UN resolution. Everybody knows how many countries have not fulfilled UN resolution. So why single out Iraq?

I urge the US and the UN to take reasonable attitude in the matter and finish so-called inspections in Iraq as soon as possible. UN should withdraw embargo on Iraq immediately for the sake of peace and the people of Iraq.

M Rezaul A Bhuiyan
Khilgaon, Dhaka.

"Sons or Daughters"

Sir, Dr. Sabrina Rashid's "Sons or Daughters" was published in the OPINION section of *The Daily Star* on the 8th of January. Unfortunately when it comes to children, we become very choosy. Putting it correctly, the term ought to be "sexists". We have a tendency to celebrate more if a son is born, on the other hand a newly born daughter is a bit less-celebrated. A long time back the villagers used to prefer sons than daughters simply because the sons could come to their aid in their old age. The daughters needed to be married off which was another headache too. The size of a family also used to be big. As the mortality rate was high, it was thought to be an insurance policy to have more-than-needed children. Because who ever lived was the bonus, who ever died was considered the will of the Lord.

But times have changed. Nowadays couples do not dream of having more children, because the chances are most of them will live, children have more choice to prefer a career of their dream, and there's no guarantee which child will look after which parent.

There was one thing Dr. Rashid, mentioned which I oppose vehemently. You quite successfully portrayed two examples of an old father and

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? To 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 BRAC 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 steal 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 anybody 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

Admission to Dhaka University

Sir, We are admission-seekers (97-'98) into Dhaka University 'Kha' Unit. The admission test is very near — perhaps in February. We know that the admission form will be available from this month. But we are not sure of that and it is very regretting that though our admission test is near yet we have no idea about this test — written or MCQ.

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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. At a time when information technology has shrunk the globe, and regional cushions are the order of the day.

The politicians have to monitor carefully the feedback in the two countries to Mr Nawaz Sharif's feeler. Bangladesh is a predominantly Muslim-majority country, hence it has a global role to play in the Islamic world. It has also to have clear stands with the neighbours and the regional partners. The WTO is also sending a message for collective stands. We might miss the bus if we delay.

The financial world is changing fast; and a new mutation of capitalism is on the

waning way. The political culture has also to change to keep in tune with the times. Economics and trade are going to play a dominating role in governance, external or internal.

The recent three-nation business summit in Dhaka has great potential, depending on the foresight and judgement of the political leadership. Pakistan has sent out a feeler to Bangladesh. After sometime the public opinion will take some shape.

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 businessmen 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.