

## Welcoming Chinese PM

The ties can only get closer

THE state visit of the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao to Bangladesh today is indeed, as the foreign secretary has stated, an important milestone for the country, and we would like to extend our heartiest welcome to the Premier on the occasion of his visit, and to hope for fruitful talks between the two governments.

Today China is a global power. It is already an economic powerhouse and its economy continues to grow and mature in leaps and bounds. Similarly, its role in Asia and the world in general is expanding every day.

China's standing in regional affairs has been vastly enhanced by the fact that the elements of conflict which had characterised its relationship with India are on the mend. Similarly, the relationship between Pakistan, long an ally of China, and India is also improving steadily. This rapprochement is good for the entire region including Bangladesh.

Against this backdrop of changing regional dynamics, the visit to Bangladesh of the Chinese Prime Minister gains additional significance that transcends the bilateral relationship.

China has much to offer Bangladesh, and we feel that a good relationship between our two countries can be of considerable benefit to China as well. Currently, Bangladesh imports over a billion dollars worth of goods from China annually, and with direct road and air links between Bangladesh and Kunming in southern China, both-way trade can increase dramatically. For our part, we would want to increase our meagre \$46 million of annual exports to China, and could benefit from more Chinese investment as well as technological and managerial assistance.

Most importantly for China though, is the fact that, together with Myanmar, Bangladesh can provide a bridge between southern China and India that would open up and transform the entire region. Thus, Bangladesh has much to offer, both to China and the region as a whole.

China's political leadership has been quite astute in recent times. It has been bold enough to open up the economy and strong enough to manage the ensuing changes, thus transforming China into the emerging superpower that it is today. The future can only be imagined. A fruitful relationship between Bangladesh and China should thus be one of the coveted goals for Bangladesh and we sincerely hope that the ties exemplified by this state visit continue to strengthen.

## Creeping back

Apply the ban strictly

THE government banned polythene bags on January 1, 2002 as part of its plan to contain the threat that such material posed to the environment. For understandable reasons, it was seen as a move in the right direction. But reports say that the trade in polybags has staged a comeback with the setting up of factories and sale centres in the old part of the city, not so surreptitiously at that. This is in wanton violation of the law.

The decision-makers have to take a reappraisal of the situation. The benefits of a ban on polythene bags which translated into an improvement of the environment around us risk being lost gradually. It has been proven beyond doubt that as container of foodstuff polybag is not safe. Then the biggest problem it creates is the clogging of sewerage lines due to indiscriminate proliferation of polythene. The insoluble nature of the material causes great damage to the soil as well, with grave long-term implications. So, polybags mustn't feature in any scheme of healthy living.

It is suspected that the business in polybags goes on under the nose of law enforcers. The price of the bags in the post-ban period having gone up by 50 per cent, the producers do not find it difficult to spend money to buy the indifference of policemen.

Clearly, the problem lies in the slack on the part of law enforcers to catch the culprits. Though the police claimed having made raids on the clandestine factories from time to time, the results speak for themselves. They have to bring the producers and sellers of banned polybags to book before the illegal business can be stopped. The law has to be enforced strictly.

# Of intelligence failure and trained apes



It is said that truth is the first casualty in war. The report of the "Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States regarding WMD" has established that truth is a casualty long before a war is embarked upon.

The two points that Donald Rumsfeld stressed upon vigorously many times when it came to the question of Iraq and its weapons of mass destruction was that, "lack of evidence of it (WMDs) was not evidence of the lack of it." He reinforced this point further by saying that that even a "trained ape" knew it was true.

The report of the commission set up by President Bush to determine the intelligence capabilities, have come out with a most damning indictment of US intelligence agencies for getting it "dead wrong" about Iraq's WMDs. And to think that such a mess in Iraq, with more than hundred thousand Iraqi civilian deaths and more than 1,500 US soldiers killed, has all been the consequences of botched intelligence analysis. And nobody will be made to answer for this death and

destruction. It is not that the findings of the latest, and some suggest the last, presidential commission on Iraq, is anything new or that the commission has provided a different insight into the matter. It has merely confirmed what the rest of the world, except perhaps for Bush and Blair, knew to be true, and what the previous commissions had revealed. And contrary to what Rumsfeld believed, as it has been confirmed once again, as if it needed any confirmation in the first place, that all the stories

inquiry." That was only to be expected. It is no secret that all actions that are necessary to keep that issue under wraps have been taken by the US president and his Congressional allies. The Robert Committee, which was set up precisely to address that particular issue, and whose report was put on hold till after the elections, appears now to be inconsequential. This was made abundantly clear by the comments of the chairman of the committee, Pat Roberts, "We have now heard it

Saddam was not only a threat, but that immediate action against him was an imperative, on the report of one single source. The commission has revealed that the CIA had depended solely on one source, code-named Curveball, whose credentials turned out to be unreliable and whose reports turned out to be false and fabricated. Although the Silberman Commission has hedged many important issues, some of the findings have been rather extraordinary and confirm the fact that intelligence

essence for going to a war whose conceptualisation predated 9/11; the preliminary thoughts on a possible Iraq invasion were put together well before the al Qaeda attacks on the Twin Towers. To think that the largest and the biggest intelligence apparatus in the world with 15 agencies and a budget of almost \$40 billion would not double check information from a source, an Iraq defector, who was handled not by them but by another country, is incomprehensible, unless, of course, the common

belief, that the ultimate objective of the entire intelligence exercise leading up to March 20, 2003, was to manufacture and mould intelligence to conform to the plans drawn up by the Bush neo-cons, is taken as true. This view is validated by the committee's conclusions that "U.S. intelligence agencies' reliance on Curveball and their failure to scrutinise his claims are the primary reason" that the CIA and other spy agencies "fundamentally misjudged the status of Iraq's [biological weapons] programs." This is, one could surmise, a veiled attempt to also salvage the intelligence community. But the fundamental flaw in the judgments caused by lack of scrupulous

**For the impartial observer the only conclusion that he can draw from this report is that it is an exercise to bail out the Bush administration of the charges of deliberate fixing the intelligence to validate arguments in favour of the Iraqi invasion. The convenient horse to flog is the intelligence agencies, whose "failures" have been used as a fig leaf to hide the follies of the administration. There are serious implications on both counts.**

about Iraq possessing WMDs remains what it was, a complete myth. But, what the commission has helped to do, however, is to absolve the Bush administration of any culpability in initiating the Iraqi mayhem, by skirting the larger issue of how the intelligence was used by the administration. It was not within the commission's terms of reference to detect any connection between the intelligence failure and the Bush administration's decision to go to war on unsubstantiated intelligence. According to the commission's co-chairman, Laurence Silberman "Our executive order did not direct us to deal with the use of intelligence by policy makers, and all of us were agreed that that was not part of our

access to 40 items did not make much difference considering the size of the trade imbalance and the demand for those categories of product in Indian market. In the 6th JEC meeting held at Dhaka in July, 2003, Bangladesh had demanded duty-free entry of 180 items to India. India had reviewed it but no final promise was expressed. The three-day Bangladesh-India Joint Secretary level trade talks ended in Dhaka on October 22, 2003. In that meeting, the Indian side did not respond positively or clearly to the issue of removal of non-tariff barriers imposed by India. Indian negotiators expressed that India could not

analysis was formulated to fit preconceived opinion and predetermined decision rather than the reverse. This is what we call in the military parlance "situating the appreciation" to fit predetermined action plan rather than "appreciating the situation" to arrive rationally to certain courses of action. The intelligence fed the president and his hawks what he wanted to hear and not what he should hear. According to the report, what the intelligence agencies indulged in was "selling" [of] intelligence -- in order to keep... the First Customer interested." It kept the "First Customer" happy also because it helped him to pull wool over the eyes of his credulous countrymen and obtain their acqui-

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# Bangladesh-India economic relations

DR. KAZI IHTESHAM and MOHAMMAD MAHABUBUR RAHMAN

INDIA is the biggest trade partner of Bangladesh. Surrounded by India on three sides, India's market interest in Bangladesh is magnified with geo-political interest. Economic relations between the two countries are in favour of India to the proportion of 15:1. But the economic interests of each other are mutually vital. Bangladesh depends on India in areas like raw industrial materials, all kinds of motor vehicles, food-stuff of different varieties, cosmetics etc.

### Early stage

After the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, India contributed to the shaping up of the economy of the newly emerged state. During Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's regime (1971-75), the effect of Indo-Bangla political relations markedly influenced economic relations of two countries. India's contribution to Bangladesh's economy was substantial. Bangladesh received US\$ 275.27 million as grants from India from 1971-76. An India-Bangladesh Trade Agreement was signed on 28th March 1972, based on a friendly and co-operative environment. Following this, a new Trade Agreement (for a period of three years) was signed on 5th July 1972. After the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in August 1975, Indo-Bangladesh relations deteriorated seriously, so did economic activities.

In the year 1980, the two countries reached a decision to develop their economic relations with a new spirit. In the same year a new trade agreement was signed on the basis of the previous agreement signed by the Mujib government. To strengthen economic relations, a new Joint Economic Commission (JEC) was set up in 1982. Up to 2004 this commission met very infrequently. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed during the JEC meeting held in Delhi in 1997. The agreement promised cooperation among the signatories and covered sectors like industry, education and culture, science and technology, agriculture, border trade, transport cooperation, telecommunication etc. The sixth JEC

meeting was held between Bangladesh and India at Dhaka in 14-16 July, 2003. Here both countries agreed to start talks about FTA (Free Trade Area) between the two countries. The FTA talks started in mid October, 2003, but some issues like tariff and para-tariff barriers remained unresolved and the agreement left unsigned.

### Trade imbalance

Bangladesh-India economic relation suffers from trade imbalance for Bangladesh. Increasing high trade imbalance is a cause of concern and frustration. In the year 1996-97 the deficit was US\$ 891.30 million. In

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desh. 'India entered into an agreement with Bangladesh to extend a credit line of Rs. 200 crore to Bangladesh in June 1999. This credit line is being utilised to import double-decker buses, railway locomotives and other related items.' (Official website, Ministry of External Affairs of Government of India)

"There are 28 Indian joint ventures in Bangladesh with an equity participation of US\$ 16.6 million and 7 wholly owned subsidiaries with an equity of US\$ 0.6 million in various areas such as textiles, building industry, chemicals, IT, automobile sector, etc." (Official website, Ministry of External Affairs of Government

8000 employment directly and 60,000 indirectly. Bangladesh is suffering from unemployment problem and the proposed projects would undoubtedly create job opportunities. Like Tata group other Indian MNC's and industrialists can also invest in Bangladesh. Bangladesh government should renew and formulate an enhanced business policy to protect foreign private investment.

### Bangladesh's look east policy

The present BNP led four-party alliance government in Bangladesh

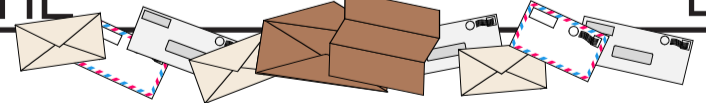
in July, 2003. At that time foreign minister of Bangladesh M. Morshed Khan agreed with him. To establish South Asian Union like European Union, the bilateral relations of the countries of SAARC should be strengthened first and SAARC as a successful regional organisation activated. In January, 2004 the SAFTA agreement was signed at SAARC conference. Effectiveness of agreement like this is very much dependent on the bilateral economic relations like Bangladesh-India economic relation. An FTA (Free Trade Area) talk has already started between Bangladesh and India which might strengthen economic relations between two countries. Unfortunately the postponement of SAARC Conference at Dhaka is a great setback to regional cooperation including trade. The talks on the establishment of a tri-natural gas pipeline which will transfer natural gas from Myanmar to India through Bangladesh are going on.

Although economic relations are improving between the two countries slowly, both countries should be careful about political ramifications. Irresponsible comments from responsible persons sometimes badly affect the friendly relations which in turn may affect economic relations. To strengthen the economic ties both countries should be sincere to solve the prevailing disputes among them. As a big power India should show more responsibility to and respectfulness of its neighbours. Hegemonic attitude can create only misunderstanding and hostility. The agreements and MOU's signed by the two countries should be abided by with appropriate follow-ups. India and Bangladesh, both are highly potential economic partners. More and more mutually beneficial economic activities will not only bring economic profit for them but also act as a role model for other countries of the region.

Dr. Kazi Ihtesham teaches History at Jahangirnagar University. Mohammad Mahabubur Rahman is a researcher in International Relations.

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# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### Watch before you eat!

Imagine you are a VIP attending a high profile seminar. After the discussion session you are served with the much-awaited delicious food with bottled mineral water. Or you are just a common person who needs to have meal at a hotel due to your hectic schedule. Next time you go to a hotel can you order the food with the same ease you used to? They have served us dog's flesh, even human parts as food. Now they are serving dead chicken.

Hotel business is thriving. There is hardly anyone to inspect what is going on and what is being served as food. According to recent news reports, there is an organised gang who supply dead chickens to the hotel owners and there are also people engaged in "re-filling" the mineral water bottles.

The threat posed to public health should get more attention. It should

be dealt with seriously and the people who dare to commit such heinous crimes should be taught a good lesson before it's too late. Perhaps, it's already too late!

Saif Dhaka

### Fish cultivation

Our country is blessed with a coastal belt, dozens of big flowing rivers and thousands of large tanks and small ponds across the country.

Bangladeshis have tried different palatable dishes but till today rice and fish remain the staple food of nearly 140 million people. It is unfortunate that we buy white fishes for our consumption from the neighbouring countries, which means we pay them for cleansing their ponds and tanks with lime stones and insecticides, employing skilled fishermen and engaging their fleet for fish transportation.

On the contrary, many of our ponds and tanks remain filled with water hyacinth and rotten algae. Due to irregular occupation these days unskilled people are available as fishermen. Many of our fishing boats and trawlers are becoming idle due to depletion of 'fish stock' in the country.

There should be an imminent reversal of the aforesaid trend! An earliest cabinet decision of the government for utilising every CSD godown for storing and distribution of lime stones, insecticides and fish fry and feeds, and thereupon the trickle down programmes of the department of fisheries, UNDP, NGOs and private companies, can enhance white fish cultivation across the country.

### Golam Ashraf

DOHS Baridhara, Dhaka-1206

### SSC Bangla exam

We, as parents have been utterly

dismayed to see how hard and weird the current SSC Bangla 2<sup>nd</sup> paper questions have been, specially the MCQ (objective) section, for no understandable reason! These question selectors must have tried their best to unnerve and scare our children by selecting very complex, unusual and strange MCQs. We the parents just watched helplessly while our children came out of halls shuddering and shaken having appeared in this exam.

We have physically observed ourselves at a few city exam centres how most of the SSC examinees expressed their extreme resentment for performing poorly at the hall due to such extremely difficult MCQs. What sense does this make anyway to these 'wise' examiners to select such strange MCQs, may we ask?

Our children are only appearing in SSC exams and not doing any thesis for Ph.D in Bangla, please bear in mind, the arbiters of our children's fate!

Having said it all, may I, through this humble letter, earnestly request the Chief Controller of Examinations of Dhaka Board and all other appropriate authorities to have this issue looked into with due seriousness and compassion.

Please, for heaven's sake, see that our helpless children receive fair treatment and justice from you all while you put marks in their answer scripts, in the light of this year's unusually difficult and strange MCQs in Bangla 2<sup>nd</sup> paper.

### Shah Mushtaque Ahmed

Dhanmondi, Dhaka

### UNDP office

The dismal performance in ICT sector is not only limited to the government but this disease has also severely affected international development partners.

The UNDP office in Bangladesh is no exception, it reminds me of an old Indian poetry "Har shaks par Uloo baihe hain, us gulshan ka kya kahena hai?" meaning is "What is to say about this garden where owls are sitting on each branches".

### Zeenat Z. Syed

Dhaka

### Deaths of children

Your editorial on how children die in our country has brought into focus a very important issue. Deaths of children take place at an alarming rate in this country. Still, we were not aware that 83 such deaths occur every day on an average in Bangladesh. The causes behind such

deaths are not far too seek. Yet we have failed to do anything about this matter.

In fact, our sensitivity to accidents is far less than what it should be. Ours is a country with too many rivers and pond. But children, especially in towns, are seldom taught how to swim. Similarly, fire deaths are increasing day by day as incidents of fire are on the rise and we do not have the needed fire fighting arrangements.

But the area that I want to shed light on is first aid or quick medical attention. Injured children do not get emergency medical assistance. Obviously, the situation is pathetic when it comes to poor people. The health authorities should look into the matter and set things right.

Social awareness is another point of concern. We have to realise that children are a highly vulnerable lot and their security should be

ensured by society. Enacting laws to protect the rights of children is a good thing but it will not be enough until people do their bit for the budding lives.

The government, social organisations and NGOs have a role to play here. The statistics on the premature deaths of children should awaken them to the ground reality. We have achieved remarkable success in preventing certain life-threatening diseases. But the good work will mean nothing if children die in accidents of various kinds. I do not want to say that all accidents can be prevented. But we should at least try to remove certain risk factors.

The issue should be addressed by those at the helm of affairs.

### Abdur Rahman Khan

Dhaka