

## Free mobility of labour

Shorten the waiting time

IT is good news. But just like common sense being uncommon, the obvious or the self-evident has often been consigned to a state of cultivated indifference. Plainly glossed over by those who have in them what it takes to change things around.

So it is with a cautious sense of optimism that we greet the fourth WTO mini-ministerial decision at Livingstone in Zambia to endorse Bangladesh's motion for unfettered movement of labour from one place to another. It will be tabled at the full fledged ministerial meet scheduled for December 13-18 in Hong Kong.

Bangladesh has raised the issue before. At the last LDC ministerial meet in Dhaka it was resolved that the issue of free movement of labour worldwide would be pressed at the relevant fora. It was placed at Cancun but to little avail. Besides, every time attempts were made to push the issue at a forthcoming summit or ministerial, the slated conference would willy-nilly get postponed.

What the LDCs are merely asking for is temporary migration of natural persons who are driven by economic factors to seek employment abroad. They are in the less skilled category and therefore need preferential treatment with a human face. As a matter of fact, GATT allowed temporary movement of people from one country to another without any restrictions imposed on such migration.

The developed countries have tried to undercut the agreement of the WTO ministerial on free mobility of less skilled labour instead of doing their part in helping to implement the agenda. For curious reasons they seem allergic or lukewarm to the idea.

Two facts are established about the merit of Bangladesh's motion. First, migration of labour has immensely helped the economies of both sending and receiving countries. Secondly, according to a well-publicised recent study under the auspices of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), those employed from the LDCs in the less skilled category are mostly absorbed in the services sector. The implications are that the host countries need such people and that they do not rob the locals of any potential or real job opportunity.

Labour, let's not forget, is a commodity. It's also a major, most vital, factor of production. If free, equitable and fair trade is what the WTO is all about then there is no reason why a consensus can't emerge on unfettered mobility of labour across the globe.

## Street children

Not an issue to be side-tracked

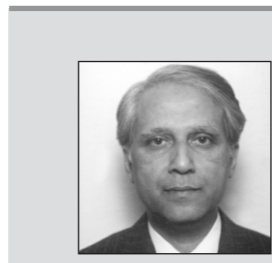
THE suggestion that a 'one-stop crisis centre' be opened in all public hospitals for taking the street children under its wings is a laudable one. INCIDIN, the NGO that works closely with 'misplaced children' made the recommendation because, according to them, nearly 450 thousand such children around the country are victims of physical, sexual and mental abuses and almost all of them are left with no assistance or help from anyone at all to eke out a living. This is quite unbelievable.

We have heard many scary stories of brutal and violent treatment meted out to floating street children. They live an unprotected life falling easy prey to all kinds of abuses. No matter how preposterous it may sound, the fact is -- there are so-called human beings who take criminal advantage of these innocent children and their unprotected lives, and get away with it, since these children have no one to turn to or nowhere to seek help from against all kinds of injustice done on them. And that's why we think the need for a composite crisis centre from where they can get medical attention, shelter and legal support, is being felt more than ever before.

These street children seem to have become invisible to us as we very rarely talk about them or even think about them. We should ask our conscience whether it's right. We must begin to sympathise with their plight and do everything possible to defend their rights. Though there are government initiatives in the area, needless to say, they are not enough. There are hundreds and thousands of children who are still living lives full of risks and vulnerabilities. The answer lies in collaboration between the private and public sectors to help these children out of the morass. We are sure there are plenty of individuals and institutions who would gladly donate to this cause, only on condition that the expenditure will be well-audited. We need to get these big-hearted persons and organisations under one umbrella with an assurance.

Let's not ignore these forgotten members of our society; for, it's their birthright to have a decent living.

# Constructive engagement in Indo-Bangladesh relations



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

IT was indeed disappointing to note the scathing attack of the Chief Minister of West Bengal within two days of the conclusion of the meeting between the Foreign Secretaries of Bangladesh and India. Mr. Buddhadev Bhattacharya accused Bangladesh of 'sheltering insurgents on its soil and exporting terrorists to India'. Such an accusation assumes importance given the fact this is the first time that the West Bengal State government has raised the issues of terrorism and infiltration so strongly.

We have heard of similar complaints from the leadership of the Assam State in north-eastern India. Complaints included allegations that there are fundamentalist groups in this country and that they are collaborating with 'Jihadis' from India. It has also been mentioned that insurgents from the United Liberation Front based in Assam are getting shelter in Dhaka. This fact is being stressed despite strong denials in this regard from the Bangladesh authorities.

Both Chief Ministers have also stated in the recent past that demographic changes are taking place in some of the bordering districts of these States adjoining Bangladesh, due to illegal entry of Bangladeshis. One would presume that the Indian authorities have suitable statistics to back these claims. However, if such assumptions are just based on

increase in the population of Bengali speaking Muslims in these areas, then such an approach could indeed be flawed. I would strongly suggest that joint survey teams should be established to evaluate these claims and take necessary further action. Otherwise, such criticism will only exacerbate tension, suspicion and provocation particularly for the minority Muslim population living in the Indian bordering districts. Let us not forget that extremist nationalist

led both sides to discuss mutual areas of aggravation. It was also relevant because exchange of views and discussion are both necessary to better understand each other. It also enables parties to identify least common denominators which can then be built upon.

It would appear that some of the suspicions and recriminations that have bedevilled relations between India and Bangladesh since 1975 continue to exist. Both sides re-

the easy way out and sought superficial compromise by skirting around difficult issues. There was shared willingness to acknowledge sensitive concerns.

In this context, one hopes that India has noted and will take necessary steps to address the issue of some Bangladeshi miscreants and notorious criminals seeking safe refuge in Calcutta and adjoining areas. It would probably be helpful to resolve existing differences and

bours should profit from the growing Indian presence on the world map. In this regard, Bangladesh was also invited to get on board the Indian Oriental Express steaming towards south-east Asia and the Far East.

We have since then had the meeting of the two Foreign Secretaries. We have also been informed by the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary that in the near future there will be several visits to Bangladesh by senior Indian officials and also

being connoted. There are also suggestions that such facility should be tagged to Bangladesh obtaining certain advantages from India. One can only hope that both sides will use this as a spring-board to evolve further infrastructural cooperation in other areas.

We can benefit from Indian expertise in the fields of agriculture, science and technology. What is also required is a constructive approach in water sharing and management. The monsoon season is upon us and soon there will be conditions that might lead to floods. Mutual goodwill could be further enhanced by the sharing of information obtained from upper riparian points of the many rivers that enter Bangladesh from India. This will enable us to prepare better for flood forecasting. I am not referring here to lead information available from the Farakka Barrage site. I am asking for information about river water flow further up-stream, both in the upper reaches of the Ganges as well as in the Brahmaputra.

The 13<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit is scheduled to be held in Dhaka later this year. We are looking forward not only to the visit of the Indian Prime Minister but also further consolidation of the SAARC process. His visit, most certainly, will be a confidence building measure.

In the meantime, Bangladesh, quite understandably, will watch with great care what happens to the reforms process initiated within the UN system. We all know the special significance that India is attaching to this initiative. Everyone must appreciate the need for improved connectivity within our region. It is important for stability and economic progress. In this end-sum game, every South Asian needs to be a winner.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador -- any response to mzamir@dhaka.net



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forces exist in each country and they do not necessarily follow reason and logic. This is a pernicious area which should not be encouraged. If necessary, call in the UNHCR or any other international agency or representatives from civil societies from both countries that deal with the effects of illegal migration, rehabilitation of displaced populations and let them sift through information. Parties in the meantime should refrain from making provocative statements about minority populations. This is not helping the gradual process of normalisation. That must be given priority over everything else.

The just-concluded Foreign Secretary level talks in Delhi were probably nothing more than a 'get-acquainted' experience as many analysts have claimed. However, it took place, and that is important. Few thought that such a meeting would result in solutions. It was more significant because it permit-

ted their positions. There was a thin sliver of flexibility in some new areas. However, on most old issues, there was frank discussion, euphemism for disagreement. That, in a way is good. It is always better to be able to identify each other's cards on the table.

We need to view such talks from a proper perspective. There has been speculation that delay in issuing the joint statement was an indication of lack of success and an effort to paper over wide differences. I believe that such an interpretation of the last minute delay is reading too much into factors.

What has been demonstrated during the meeting was the desire for good neighbourly relations. It also reflected that both sides made an attempt to engage in resolving their serious concerns -- be it security, sharing of waters, reducing the glaring imbalance in their bilateral trade or completion of border demarcation. They have not taken

agree on a suitable framework that could assist extradition.

Another area of concern is the informal trade and smuggling of contraband narcotics and items like phensyldyl from India into Bangladesh. Authorities in the adjoining Indian States could try to identify those involved and clamp down on their activities.

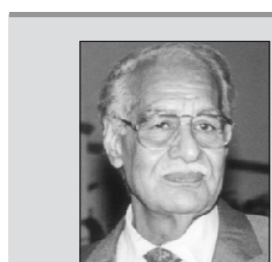
We must understand that the prospect of good neighbourly relations between Bangladesh and India have to be further strengthened. This is vital for progress within South Asia. There is bound to be spill-over effects for the entire region.

We have recently had a very successful trip to Dhaka of Ambassador Rajiv Sikri, Secretary in the Indian External Affairs Ministry. During the course of his many meetings and discussions, Mr. Sikri highlighted the future potential of India. He also suggested that Bangladesh, like other Indian neigh-

exchanges in critical sectors. It has also been suggested that two agreements related to trade and investment would be signed shortly while the Joint Working Group on trade, paratariff and non-tariff barriers would meet in Dhaka by August this year. It also appears that agreement has been reached on the need for the Joint Rivers Commission to meet soon in Dhaka. The two sides have also decided to explore the possibility of commencing not only Dhaka-Guwahati, Dhaka-Shillong and Dhaka-Siliguri bus services but also Dhaka-Kathmandu bus service, passing through Indian territory.

All of these are important steps. It is understood that the two sides also discussed the sensitive subject of the planned tri-nation gas pipeline passing through Bangladesh to India. This project, like so many other cooperation initiatives with India, is under scrutiny by Bangladesh. Strategic implications are

## It's non-governance



KULDEEP NAYAR  
writes from New Delhi

IT is difficult to say which government harms the state more: the one that does not perform or the one that misperforms. Both mismanage. Both betray the interests of people. Both are a failure. Practically every state in India -- they are 26 -- belong to one category or the other. Their inability to govern has made the administration effete and the treasury empty. They have barely funds to run the government with very little money left for development. The meeting of the National Development Council (NDC) held at Delhi amply proves this.

Agriculture which is a state subject is growing by 1.5 per cent annually while the population increasing around two per cent. The price of inputs has gone up. Farmers have no crop insurance and the states no money for agriculture. Their complaint at the NDC meeting was valid: the Centre has put them in a straightjacket without disciplining itself. Still, the fact remains that the states' ills are of their own making. I have visited four states -- Orissa, Karnataka, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh -- in the last few

weeks. It has been an unhappy experience. Governance is too chaotic, too dispersed and too politicised. None of the four chief ministers has either leeway or idea to plan, much less perform. Wrangling within their own party take most of their time.

Orissa chief minister Naveen Patnaik is a non-governing type. His reputation is that of an honest person, although inept in administration. But then he has left all to a clique of his favourite officials. His

Naveen doesn't lose sleep over such allegations. Nor does it bother him that he can't speak the state language, Oriya. But his greatest handicap is the comparison with his dynamic father, Biju Patnaik, who brought a minor industrial revolution in the state.

Karnataka has a coalition, Congress chief minister Dharam Singh heading it. He is also a non performer. But he attributes his helplessness to former Prime Minister Deve Gowda who, as a coalition

governance. Krishna is reportedly in direct touch with New Delhi on the one hand and Bangalore on the other. He wants to return to Karnataka and claims to have better contacts with the coalition partner. Karnataka is one state where the BJP is concentrating in the south and getting some response.

Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh is all bluff and bluster. First, he whipped up frenzy in the name of corruption against his predecessor Prakash Singh Badal. But that is

Telugu Desam one year ago and brought the Congress in the wake of frequent suicides by farmers. People expected a down-to-earth administration in place of a high-tech and high-flying chief minister Chandrababu Naidu they had roundly defeated. But they are a disappointed lot. The number of farmers who killed themselves during the entire five-year regime of Telugu Desam is equal to the suicides in the one-year rule of the Congress. Technical know-how has

the Congress swept the polls may go the other way because of people's diminishing faith on the promise to constitute a separate state.

The visit to the four states has also confirmed my view that non-performance or misperformance means the same thing. It is the absence of governance. The deterioration in law and order, the demand for reservations and marginalisation of the poor -- all this has come to the fore because the basic problems have not been tackled. The chief minister either does not perform or misperforms.

In fact, India's experience is that a one-party government has generally misperformed. There is no accountability. But, in contrast, coalitions perform are weak. They have to make compromises to keep the flock together. Since concession is the glue, the Centre has to give in when an ally threatens to break away. Consequently, New Delhi has become weak, although it still monopolises power. The states are slowly usurping the territory that belongs to the Centre. It cannot assert itself because it is too dependent on political parties in the state.

The Manmohan Singh government can do very little under the circumstances. The BJP-ruled states have made their own consortium to defy the Centre. The parties supporting him want a pound of flesh. I wonder how much of the crisis the Left has tried to create at New Delhi is economic and how much political.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.



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hobbyhorse is a grand design for the state. In the sterile seventh year of his rule, he has hit upon the idea of handing over the state's rich mineral resources to the multinationals. He has signed the biggest investment deal in the country with a South Korean firm for Rs. 51,000 crore for a steel plant. More deals are in the pipeline, this time to export minerals.

The state is, however, agog with rumours that multinationals pay "a cut" to Naveen's men at Delhi. There is no evidence of that and it may well be part of a vilification campaign which, he says, he has been facing since coming to power. In any case,

partner, is riding his back all the time. Gowda is so meddlesome that he has opposed the proposal to have metro in Bangalore where roads cannot cope with the congestion. Despite government's inefficiency, a new industrial unit opens practically every day in Bangalore.

Karnataka too has a huge quantity of iron ore. Like Orissa, the Dharam Singh government sees to it that every irregular digging is allowed at the expense of forests, provided it gets its share in the bounty. As if the chief minister's plate is not full, Maharashtra governor S.M. Krishna, his predecessor, is not letting him devote much to

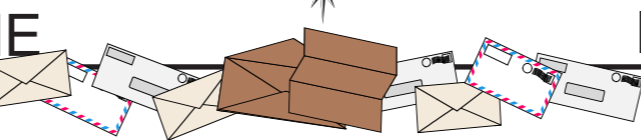
stopping outside the rural areas because it is considered one of the reasons for the defeat of the Telugu Desam. On the other hand, corruption has increased manifold. It is an open secret that even the highest in the state has a cut in the allocations for irrigation projects.

The Naxalite problem is economic, not political. Talks with the radicals have not been successful because the state's kitty, after the usual outlets of corruption, has not enough to create jobs. This is one state which gives you the impression that the Telugu Desam would return if elections were held today. Even the Telangana where

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## TO THE EDITOR 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.

### Harry K. Thomas

US Ambassador Harry K. Thomas will be departing Dhaka for Washington on 2 July 2005 after the completion of his 2-year term in Bangladesh. He will take up his new assignment as the Executive Director of the US State Department on his arrival in the US.

Based on the media reports regarding his performance so far in Bangladesh, it appears Ambassador Thomas has served the country with distinction during the past 2 years. Congratulations! Further, my appreciation goes to his superiors and the team members who had supported him in the effort towards the realisation of the goals, especially those pertaining to various dimensions of the US-Bangladesh relationship.

It is expected Mr. Thomas, in his new position, will be able to project Bangladesh and its people to the US government, the people of the US and others in pursuit of sustaining and promoting the future shared by both the countries in an ever competitive, progressively reintegrating, increasingly uncertain and continually transforming world. It is also expected the Charge d' Affaires of the US Embassy in Bangladesh (after the departure of

Ambassador Thomas) and the new Ambassador (the replacement of Ambassador Thomas) will build upon (for example) the success of Harry for facilitating further improvements in the US-Bangladesh relationship on a continuing basis.

Finally, one of the general expectations is: the relationship between the two countries will continue to grow in a more meaningful fashion through the foreseeable future and the development will be instrumental inter alia in assisting the people of Bangladesh and the people of the US in their efforts towards knowing each other more intimately and transacting more meaningfully in pertinent areas for their mutual benefit and satisfaction. Bangladesh and the US have the potential to set example for others to follow. (Dr) M S Haq Dhaka

### Europe in the slow lane

The constitutional tangles in EU are not surprising. These imperialists who lorded over vast colonies for centuries taste the intimations of insecurity syndromes (of lower standard of living). This negative situation has made the United States more sensi-

tive, and it is bungling its foreign affairs policies. There is an apt Bangla expression: *hai, hai, amader ki hobey!* (O Lord, what will happen to us).

Possessiveness is a human trait, and it circulates in eddy currents. In times of stress, foes become friends and sit together, as Germany and France are doing today, on how to save EU from equaliser situation. No options: you have to face it!

While attention is being diverted to the tantrums of the Western powers, Saarc (South Asia, teeming with billions) is subtly undergoing background under-currents -- with subtle foreign interventions, of course. Advani's friendly bang in Pakistan, and the interaction of the people of 'two' Kashmir are deliberate underground policies by third parties trying to turn vast Saarc into another European Union, without visas and transit documents. This is seamless insensibility of the groovy kind, as for half a century the traditional litigants are being coerced into compromising positions with carrots and sticks (first F-16s to one nation, then F-18s to the other).

The nuclear scare is dummy, as not a single atom bomb has been exploded after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Taliban myth is a reality, but it is being interpreted in a different

way by the Western mind. The East and the West will never meet -- for economic reason, not religious.

Japan and Europe are today in the slow lane, and facing sunset years. There are other smaller nations also (S Korea, and Taiwan, with all the eggs in one basket -- USA). Corruption in Korea is endemic, with half a dozen big corporations running the whole country. The factories in the EU are becoming economically not viable, with high wages, which now cannot be afforded.

India and China have the major role beginning right now, as these two nations have to cater to more than two billion people for the next one hundred years, if not more. EU and USA simply cannot compete and control. But India's foreign policy call for microscopic analysis. It is too inward looking, and not neighbour-friendly. It goes against India's future prosperity and friendly image. Which Saarc member is depending on friendly India? None. Not a complimentary remark.

Bangladesh is not in the running, with complete absence of political consensus at the national level. It is big, indirect sabotage, not apparent to the lay voters. The political parties are cutting the branches on which

they are sitting. The right to suicide? No comment.

AMAWAZ  
Dhaka

### Campus violence

Campus violence is a common affair in Bangladesh. There is hardly any educated man who is not acquainted with the term campus violence. All the colleges and universities have become the place of practising politics. If that, they learn politics more than knowledge from their institution. But the students should not be blamed as the government and opposition political leaders lead them. It is a matter of great regret that, there is a complete anarchy even in the renowned Dhaka University, which was called the Oxford of the East. For example, we can point out here the recent incident at Dhaka University of 31<sup>st</sup> May. On this day the Jatayatnabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) attacked the general students to the Institute of Fine Arts. Many students were hurt and some were admitted at the different clinics of the city.

The tragic death of Shammi, a student of Psychology Department of Dhaka University, has become a common woe for the general stu-

dents. But student leaders are trying to gain politically from this. Campus violence not only ruins the academic environment but also spoils the life of the students and takes away many valuable lives. Due to this campus violence, we have already lost many brilliant students like Sony (BUET).

So government should be very much concerned here the campus of violence for the betterment of the nation.

TASNIM AKTER  
Dep. of ELL, IUUC  
Chawkbazar, Chittagong

### Goodbye to AKM Mosharraf Hossain

Reading The Daily Star reporting about Mr. AKM Mosharraf Hossain, ousted state minister for energy it looks to me that he is one of the men drowned in corruption. His alleged corruption pattern: sources and mode were as such that an average citizen would have no clue about -- they voted for him. Whereas, the assets he has sucked illegally belong to them and not him anyway.

Some of the typical examples of his alleged corruption include: taking huge kickback from different oil companies, appointment of

corrupt officials in different affiliates of Petrobangla against government policy, and misuse of resources by the name of foreign trip etc.

We have problems in our political arena. Mr. Hossain did not join BNP with clean hands. He already had corruption cases before joining BNP. How such a person could step into such a ladder of opportunity is a big question. Let us hope that law takes its own course and those corrupt individuals are brought to book; the sooner is better.

Md. Sahed Ali  
Vancouver, BC, Canada

### Prof. Sitara Pervin -- a tribute

Prof. Sitara Pervin didn't strike to me as a Professor of Dhaka University at the first visit. She was referred and brought to the Dermatology department, Dhaka Community Hospital by her friend and classmate, Sharmin, our colleague. Dr. Sitara Pervin waited in the lounge and entered the room when her turn came. She didn't burst into the room as would have been expected from a daughter of a President. She developed some dermatological problems. She didn't volunteer to disclose her 'other identity'. As I

leafed through her blood reports I could find out her 'other identity'. I told her that 'you didn't tell me, you are President Shahabuddin's daughter.' She just smiled. It was difficult to measure her at the first visit.

She was absolutely simple. Didn't put on any air, honest and an easy patient. I asked her to take a few tests, which she complied with and returned, for a review. I had the opportunity of meeting her 3-4 times. She left an imprint of a well-mannered, good-hearted, publicity shy, honest, well groomed lady in my mind.

I was extremely shocked at the news of her tragic, terrible, sad and premature demise.

This letter is intended to be a homage from a medical practitioner who has known Dr. Sitara Pervin for some time and liked her ways.

We pray to the Almighty for the salvation of her departed soul as she lies in her last resting place, not far from our home.

Dr. Syed Nasrullah  
Dhaka