

## Credit line with India

*Signals substantial bilateral engagement and wider connectivity*

INDO-Bangladesh relations have been put on a new, but potentially stronger footing, with the inking of a US\$ 1 billion worth of a loan agreement between New Delhi and Dhaka occasioned by the visit of Indian Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee to Dhaka. It has a 20-year repayment period on a rate of interest at 1.75 percent which in the commercial category is considered to be rather moderate. As to the opposition BNP's pointer that multilateral financing agencies could be approached, their soft-term loans with only a service charge are usually difficult to obtain, particularly in the present global financial climate, and for the types of projects specified in the loan agreement signed with India, according to experts.

The loan amounting to Tk 7,000 crore will be spent to implement 14 specific development projects designed to provide both a quantum and qualitative leap to road, railway and navigational connectivity between India and Bangladesh with transit for Bangladesh to Nepal and Bhutan and vice-versa.

The array of infrastructures, equipment and facilities we are looking at includes dredgers for Mongla Port, BIWTA and WDB, internal container river port at Ashuganj, broad gauge locomotive engines and passenger coaches, tank wagon for fuel transportation, second Bhairab bridge, second Titas bridge, double-decker buses for BRTC, developed land port, overpasses at Jurain and Malibagh, connectivity road between Ramgarh and Sabroom, power grid line and capacity-building for BSTI.

It is noteworthy that credit repayment period is 20 years with a 5-year grace period but no time-frame has been indicated for the implementation of the projects, although we assume that it will be time-bound. It involves a massive test of engineering that will have to blend the interests of both sides. Since it is a tied loan, equipment and materials will be supplied by India. We believe joint implementing agencies and oversight bodies would be needed to ensure that project implementation is manifestly beneficial to both sides. The question of maintenance ought to figure as a vital planning component.

That the decisions embodied in the joint communiqué signed between Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina in January are being followed up on at a steady pace is a measure of political will on both sides to forge a new direction in Indo-Bangla relationship. It is not the amount of loan that is so important as the definitive stimulus being provided to a massive undertaking that both sides are obliged to fulfill so that the dividend that Bangladesh is looking for in terms of infrastructure development, removal of trade gaps, service charge revenues and wider regional connectivity are attained by it. And that the gains from it are not one-sided.

At the same time, we believe this move will give a fillip to the process of resolving some outstanding issues Bangladesh has with India, especially those related to sharing of common river waters, border demarcation and peace, delimitation of maritime boundaries and the like.

## Never-ending BCL infighting

*How far is too far for the government?*

LIKE in the days of the Wild West when guns and knives were used freely by various feuding groups, so-called students belonging to Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) have been chasing one another openly on various campuses with lethal weapons. In yet another such demonstration of lawlessness on a campus, members of one faction of BCL engaged in intermittent clashes with members of another faction on Rajshahi University with handguns and machetes. The clash, that left many students injured and two bullet-hit, has a familiar ring to it -- establishing supremacy of BCL local student leaders on Rajshahi University campus.

As a routine duty, the university proctorial body along with members of the law enforcing agency rushed to the scene to bring the situation under control and arranged to send the injured to the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital after giving first aid at the university medical centre. We are quite alarmed to learn that some of the students are still in a critical condition.

It is utterly shameful and thus deplorable that the feuding BCL students have no noble cause to uphold. It is rather for their personal and group gains through manipulating admission process, allotment of hostel rooms and construction and procurement tenders that they vie with each other. They do so by exerting force on the administration staff in the name of the ruling party -- Awami League. What could be more demeaning for a student body than this as well as for the ruling party?

The story of clashes started in Jahangirnagar University and then traveled all the way to Khulna and then on to Rajshahi. So, the pertinent questions are: When would the barbaric behaviour end? When would the ruling party wake up to assess the extent of damage already done to its image and weed out the hooligans?



No one should suffer from the lack of medical attention.

## Attending the rural patients better

Apart from being centres of the administration, they must also be made the hub of all development activities. That will create a congenial environment for doctors posted there to stay with their families.

SYED FATAHUL ALIM

PATIENTS from rural areas are often seen crowding the corridors of public hospitals in the city. Most are either patients or have patients with them for treatment. It is not that all of them are suffering from diseases that cannot be treated at government-run clinics in the upazila level in the countryside. But still, they travel to the capital city for treatment. The majority have no relations or acquaintances in the city. They can not even afford to look for hotel accommodation. So, what happens if they have to wait for admission to the hospitals?

You won't be surprised to find that some of these hapless patients have made the pavements outside the hospital their temporary shelters.

But why must they go through this ordeal in the first place? Can't the upazila level government-run clinics look after their problems, unless their conditions are very critical requiring referrals to doctors in the city's more advanced hospitals?

In this context, we may recall the warning the prime minister had issued some days back against doctors skipping their

duties in rural area hospitals.

In fact, the suffering that poor rural patients often go through in the city's public hospital corridors are due mainly to the fact that rural hospitals are not run properly. What ails these rural hospitals?

Public clinics in the countryside are in fact plagued by a hundred and one problems. It is not simply that a section of the doctors in charge of those hospitals are neglecting their duties. The conditions in these hospitals are also very poor. As elsewhere in the administration, corruption is a major source of leakage through which state resources channelled to those clinics are wasted. As a consequence, the inventory of the medicine store in those hospitals is perennially in short supply. Equipment and machines for various diagnostic tests, in most cases, remain out of order. Apart from systemic problems such as power shortage, mostly poor equipment maintenance is to be blamed for their malfunctioning. And the environment in which those hospitals exist is hardly encouraging for some doctors to stay there.

But if doctors are to pursue their job with the true spirit of their vocation, they will have to relinquish much of the amenities and benefits a big city offers. The

social life, the advantage of better schools for their children, opportunities for higher training and other openings for better career, and so on, are all absent in a country life. Then why would a doctor like to stay there?

True, the job of a doctor is unlike other professions. The very nature of their job demands that they should be working in service of the suffering humanity. Before they enter the profession, they have to take an oath, a tradition going on since the time of Hippocrates of classical antiquity. The modern version of the oath introduced since 1964 makes a doctor pledge-bound to apply his hard-won knowledge for the benefit of the sick. What's more, the doctor will have to remember that warmth, sympathy and understanding should outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug and that s/he would remain a member of society, with special obligations to all her/his fellow human beings, those sound of mind and body as well as the infirm.

This is a tall order for doctors. In this era of all-engulfing consumerism and the pull of the big metropolitan centres, such demand from a doctor means he is being asked to make a lot of sacrifice for his vocation.

Even then, one would still expect some sacrifice from a doctor, since they owe some debt to the poor people of the countryside. The education they received from the public medical colleges was financed generously by the state and it hardly needs any further clarification that the source of the state resources is its

citizens, of whom, the overwhelming majority live in a rural background.

The government, on the other hand, cannot also just finish its duty with the utterance of exhortations addressing these doctors from time to time. It cannot be further emphasised that the upazila-level clinics need a major overhauling. The monitoring of how those hospitals are functioning should be strengthened. Immediate steps have to be taken to contain corruption in these hospitals. The upazilas, especially those situated far away from the metropolitan centres, would need special attention from the government. Apart from being centres of the administration, they must also be made the hub of all development activities. That will create a congenial environment for doctors posted there to stay with their families.

The problem of corruption, as well as politics involving promotion and transfer from the ministry down to the directorate, needs to be duly addressed by the highest authority. It requires the government to start decentralising the administration in earnest so that the countryside may again regain some of its earlier attractions.

Upazila level public clinics cannot be run as isolated islands. If the government is to improve the condition of rural health and mitigate the sufferings of the ailing people in rural areas, it must provide its highest attention to the local level clinics.

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## Beyond "Bengali people"

There is no logical reason for the demand of constitutional recognition to indigenous people of Bangladesh to be denied any longer. It is only possible, today, if we have a democratic leadership that has vision and respect for all its peoples.

RUPAYAN DEWAN

THE colonial term "tribal" or "upajati" is still strongly enforced in all our official documents. In some rare cases adivasi/indigenous words are also used, but not legally recognised. "Pahari," the Bengali translation of 'Hillman' is also a commonly accepted term. The leftists sometimes use the terms "ethnic minority" and "microscopic nationality." The term tribal is considered degrading and needs to be eliminated.

The birth of the Permanent Forum of Indigenous People (IP) at the highest level of UN, yearly celebration of International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, and different activities under the 1st and 2nd decades of indigenous peoples has made the term "Indigenous Peoples" popular among the IPs. The civil society and media have also been advocating "adivasi" and "Indigenous People." Some international agencies have also adopted IP policies.

But our government and some Bangali intellectuals seem opposed the indigenous term.

M.N. Larma, the founder of PCJSS and a popular parliamentarian in Bangladesh (1972-75), had proposed the term "Bangladeshi" rather than "Bangali," on the question of citizenship of Bangladesh citizenry. But his appeal for non-Bangali peoples could not move treasury benches in October 1972, during the Constitution framing debates. He wept in private, and did not open the door of his room at the MP hostel. When he finally opened it, he could not speak, but I saw the tear drops on his cheeks.

In the beginning of eighties, an interesting feature in CHT had been the consolidation of ten indigenous hill peoples into one distinctive political and territorial identity -- the "Jumma" people, to oppose the extreme Bangali chauvinism of settlers. The term "Jumma" derives from the word "Jum," a slash and burns method of cultivation, or a plot of this Jum field, and is also meant for moun-

tains.

The Chittagonians, Bangali dwellers of neighbouring Chittagong district use "Jumma" to mean the Chakmas, and this term used to be considered derogatory. However, they also used the word 'Jum' to mean CHT or land of highlanders. Among Chittagonians, if someone asks a person's whereabouts, a common reply can be "Jumot geye" (He has gone to Jum.), i.e. he has gone to the mountains/hills, meaning CHT.

Dr. Tone Bleie of Norway notes in his book Tribal Peoples, Nationalism and the Human Rights Challenge, The Adivasis of Bangladesh: "In Bangladesh the original inhabitants (known internationally as the Jummas) of Chittagong Hill Tracts." This achievement i.e., the establishment of the "Jumma" concept has been possible through internal advocacy and campaigning.

We can find the identification of communities and their listings began at an early period of our history, with Manu. Listings in British colonial period in the sub-continent began on an extensive scale through the census of 1881, while it was first started in CHT in 1871 (Hutchinson, "An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts", 1906). But CHT needs a formal move to record actual names with appropriate spellings in Bengali and English with the official recognition of the terms Jumma and indigenous identities.

In this process the Chakmas will have the scope to decide on their identity -- Chakma, Changma or Tsangma. Similarly, the Lushais may also decide to be known as Lusei or Lushei, the way Murungs have started writing Mro in their own term. This can also be seen with the Garos in greater Mymensingh -- a name given by outsiders against their own term of Mandi.

India has ratified ILO Convention 169 and the prime minister of Australia begged pardon in parliament from his indigenous people for injustices levied against them by his forefathers. The new millennium is for tolerance, mutual respect and engagement to make mother earth livable for all. Time has come to change old dogmatic ideas and mindsets.

The demand has been growing every year for the Bangladesh constitution to expand beyond its current definition of "Bengali people" as the only inhabitants of the country. There is no logical reason for the demand of constitutional recognition to indigenous people of Bangladesh to be denied any longer. It is only possible, today, if we have a democratic leadership that has vision and respect for all its peoples.

Rupayan Dewan is Member of CHT Regional Council and one of the members of the Jumma delegation to Bangladesh Government in October 1972. This essay is adapted from a forthcoming Drishtipat anthology of essays on Chittagong Hill Tracts.