

Dhaka-Minsk ties

A new window on cooperation and benefit flings open

IN Belarus, Bangladesh has made a new friend on what may be seen as breaking new ground. Since the contributions of the USSR -- of which Belarus was then a part -- during our liberation war, and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the independent nation in 1991, the recent visit of the country's Prime Minister to Bangladesh has brought the first sure signs of promise of a mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries.

During Prime Minister Myasnikovich's three-day visit to Bangladesh, Dhaka and Minsk have signed seven agreements and five memoranda of understanding (MOU). The seven agreements pertain, among other things, to promotion and protection of investment and cooperation on science, technology and education. The five MOUs relate to cooperation in the legal sphere, agro-industrial manufacturing, aquaculture and more.

Under these, there is opportunity for Bangladesh to export clothing, jute yarn, tobacco, fish and other marine products, as well as to benefit from Belarusian expertise in the area of milk production and dairy industry. Following a visit to Square Pharmaceuticals, which has contributed to Bangladesh's development as one of the fastest growing pharmaceutical manufacturing hubs in the developing world, Belarus has also agreed to import pharmaceutical products and technological expertise from the company. We believe that both are areas with much room for exploration, enhancement and benefit to Bangladesh. In addition, cooperation in the education sector as well as intersectoral dialogue between not only in the public sector but also the private and other nongovernmental bodies will serve to enrich the exchanges between the two countries.

Bangladesh will surely return the positive gestures of Belarus which were apparent in the visit of the country's PM. We hope that, leading on from this visit, both Dhaka and Minsk will continue to pursue, explore and indeed implement these and other possible avenues of mutual cooperation and benefit.

Bank credit being used

unproductively

Lax monitoring induces the trend

ARECENT research study conducted by a former Bangladesh Bank governor has come up with some startling facts. Of the eighteen banks surveyed, their managements were clueless about where the credit was going. Indeed, several senior bank officials, both serving and retired, have stressed that bank credit must be prioritised to meet the needs of productive sectors.

With private sector growth hitting an approximate 19.9 per cent, it becomes more imperative than ever that adequate bank credit is made available to it so as to ensure desired economic growth. Needless to say, banks are required to make profit. Hence, there has been a move by certain banks to invest in areas that generate a higher rate of return than industrial loans. This has been made possible due to lax monitoring by the central bank (BB). However, for BB to carry out its role as monitor properly it will require to be empowered and made fully autonomous -- two areas that remain sadly unaddressed till date.

The debate on further credit to private sector is strong on both sides. BB maintains that higher credit flow to private sector may fuel double-digit inflation. The counterargument to this is an expanding private sector not only helps develop the economy but also generates new employment. Both arguments are valid, but that is not the question here. The fact that even after the largest financial scam of the country, that of the Hall-Mark Group, the scars of which are still fresh in people's minds, we are seeing a re-enactment of poor monitoring and overseeing by BB. This obviously cannot be allowed to continue. The government must act decisively to arm BB with both tools and authority so that it may safeguard the national financial interest.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

November 16

1532

Francisco Pizarro and his men capture Inca Emperor Atahualpa.

1849

A Russian court sentences Fyodor Dostoevsky to death for anti-government activities linked to a radical intellectual group; his sentence is later commuted to hard labor.

1857

Second relief of Lucknow twenty-four Victoria Crosses are awarded, the most in a single day.

1914

The Federal Reserve Bank of the United States officially opens.

1945

UNESCO is founded.

1988

In the first open election in more than a decade, voters in Pakistan elect populist candidate Benazir Bhutto to be Prime Minister of Pakistan.

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD
BADRUL AHSAN

Finance minister's Barber Paradox

HOW many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man?" asks Bob Dylan in the opening line of his famous song

"Blowing in the Wind." The song asks many more "hows" as it goes along, but by the time it gets to the last "how" you think of our finance minister before you know. The words transform in your subconscious mind and turn into a chant verging on rant: How many times must a man say sorry before you call him a joke?

It doesn't surprise anybody that our minister has been wrong again. It doesn't surprise anybody either that he has said sorry again. This time he upped the ante by misquoting one Nobel laureate against another, and then quickly retracting his statement. But not before he blamed the media for putting those words in his mouth that he never said. The media has stuck to its guns, claiming it has recorded proof that what has been reported is what has been said.

The minister somehow forgets that odds are against him. He has been wrong so many times that nobody believes he can be right again. Only a few weeks ago he questioned the maturity level of Bangladesh Bank. Before that he said 40 billion taka

swindled from Sonali Bank was nothing. Much earlier he had said that the defrauded small investors in the stock market were greedy. In between he discharged fireworks of interjectory words like "nonsense" and "bogus," dismissing any question critical of him. Most recently he has fired another of his clichés against Bapex. He called it "stupid."

Something happens to everybody when he or she is wrong. Italian author Carlo Collodi writes in *The Adventures of Pinocchio* that

Pinocchio is punished for each lie that he tells by undergoing further growth of his nose. Presidents and prime ministers are impeached for their lies and, if not, they lose face or re-election.

Politicians lie all the time, which often extricates them from their embarrassments or make things more complicated for them. Senior George Bush told voters: "Read my lips, no new taxes." The Americans didn't forgive him for telling that lie and rejected his second term.

After Bill Clinton was asked about smoking pot as a student, he replied he never inhaled the smoke. Most Americans didn't buy that story but

they let him off the hook, because it wasn't of any vital importance to them. The Monica Lewinsky scandal almost pushed him over the edge, but his ultimate confession helped him avoid a long-drawn impeachment battle.

Our finance minister doesn't quite tell a lie. What he says is intermediate between truth and falsehood. He is inaccurate and judgmental, quick to apologise for his mistakes as he is to repeat them. The sight of the minister

at a press conference these days invokes the anxiety akin to what the world must suffer at the thought of terrorists having nuclear weapons. The minister is unpredictable and eclectic, his mouth frightening us

every time it opens in public.

Many times he is inconsequential, that weakens truth, if not wipe it out. He shows little grasp of facts, insensitive with his quickdraw reactions, and discursive within his limited vocabulary that works around his choice of three particular English words mentioned above. He is irascible, evasive and inconsistent, always entertaining but seldom convincing. The minister thinks this entire country is his living room.

FBCCI president has lately lamented that the finance minister does nothing to solve the mushrooming problems but he smiles all the time.

China dares to evolve differently

ANDRE VLTCHÉK

THE 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China concluded on November 14 after making some amendments to the CPC Constitution.

But even before the Party Constitution had been amended, many Western media outlets and commentators were ready to twist and distort the outcome -- no matter what it would be -- and glorify the Western political system. But the rumours that China would deviate from the road of socialism were pure rubbish, and it is important for China not to allow such canards to resonate louder than its own voice of reason.

China should not try to "appease" the West on this point. Instead, it should proceed determinedly to establish socialism with Chinese characteristics in the country. In practice, it would be a continuously evolving system, which, while successful economically, be in sharp contrast to what has been promoted by the West.

In Western countries, markets are supposed to dictate the direction of economies, social systems and even national development. Markets rule in Western countries because they are above political systems, elections and the people. In contrast, the Chinese model is to make the economy, markets and production serve the people.

Apart from other important issues, the 18th CPC Congress also paid great attention to the environment. The health of the environment is closely related to not only the well-being of the nation, but also of the entire planet. In his speech, CPC General Secretary Hu Jintao stressed the Party's desire to "reverse the trend of ecological deterioration and build a beautiful China." If successful, the Chinese development model could establish harmony between nature and the people.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, some Western politicians, media outlets and observers concluded that socialism had been dwarfed by Western democracy, which was far from true. The Soviet Union made the strategic mistake of competing with the United States for hegemony by sacrificing its people's livelihood, which led to a distorted

economic structure and ultimately its collapse.

The CPC learnt a lesson from the Soviet Union's mistake. And although the Chinese economy comprises many improved elements of Lenin's New Economic Policy, the Chinese system -- unlike that of the Soviet Union -- is mixed and flexible and, despite imperfections, designed to serve the nation and its people.

Under the banner of socialism with

itics, the theory kept developing and adapting to the changing situations.

That is precisely why the amendments to the Party Constitution at the 18th CPC Congress are so important. China's fast economic development is well known. But it has come at the cost of cheap labour and the environment, which is not sustainable.

The Chinese leadership knows this fully well, and that is why it lays so much importance on Scientific



AFP

A key reason why the CPC has been successful in leading the country through difficulties is its capability to catch up with the times. After Deng Xiaoping initiated the concept of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the theory kept developing and adapting to the changing situations.

Chinese characteristics, China has managed to lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, providing them with better education and longer life expectancy. So the system is socialist and, to the dismay of the West, extremely successful.

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Outlook on Development, propounded by Hu Jintao. The official explanation for Scientific Outlook on Development reads: "To put people first, we should take people's interests as the starting point and foothold of all of our works, make continuous efforts to meet various needs of the people and promote overall development of the people. To enact comprehensive development, we should quicken the pace of building socialist political and spiritual civilisations."

What is happening in China is in total contrast to the recent "democratic" presidential election in the US, where neither candidate offered any substantial change to the increasingly disillusioned and dissatisfied American citizens.

In China, people's concerns are discussed, analysed and dealt with. This is the essence of Scientific Outlook on Development. Socialism and reality go hand in hand, and China is on the way to improve the lives of its people.

The writer is an American novelist, filmmaker and investigative writer.

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