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TO ALL UNITS & MEMBERS

Dear Friends,

HISTORIC 32ND CONFERENCE OF AIRBEA

The 32nd Conference of AIRBEA held in Hyderabad on 17th – 19th February 2017 has been successfully concluded. In terms of organizing the Conference – right from very cordial reception of and attending to outstation delegates and observers till their departure, planning in minute details, enthusiasm and camaraderie displayed, deployment of a band of very young comrades, boys and girls, who worked day and night, the colourful procession winding its way from the office to **Ravindra Bharathi Auditorium** – the venue of inaugural session – artistic decorations, food and nourishment, cultural function – in every aspect the 32nd Conference surpasses the previous ones. Congratulations galore to the host unit RBIEA, Hyderabad, who have just now concluded their 60th Anniversary. Their dedication and love for the Association was amply manifest and has been a lesson to all, worth emulating.

All units took part with full complement of delegations. The CEC meeting which preceded the Conference approved the draft General Secretary's Report with a few suggestions, emphasizing that the 32nd Conference should focus on building up an organization capable of facing the challenges confronting us and grooming new cadres for taking over the leadership in the days to come, both locally as well as centrally.

In the well packed Ravindra Bharathi Auditorium, where leaders of bank employees movement and fraternal trade unions in and around the city of Hyderabad, senior officers of RBI, retired colleagues and friends from the media assembled in large number, the inaugural session started with an attractive cultural function steeped in traditions of Telengana/ Andhra. In his welcome address **Shri Nayani Narasimha Reddy**, Hon'ble Home and Labour Minister of Telengana, Chairman of Reception Committee, narrated briefly the background of formation of the State of Telengana, the youngest State of India, and said, "we feel privileged to host the Conference in the City of Pearls". Praising AIRBEA for its efforts to improve welfare of Reserve Bank employees and for being engaged "in its fight against any move to do away with the regulatory and supervisory role of RBI and its role in public debt management", as an important member of Telengana Cabinet, Shri Narasimha Reddy rightly added that "Transfer of Public Debt Management from RBI to Public Debt Management Agency, as contemplated, leads to deprivation of necessary funds to the State Governments and consequently leading to regional imbalances". He further stated, "The country's economy and banking industry were saved due to strong regulatory and expert supervision by RBI when the Banks elsewhere collapsed during 2008 global economic crisis. AIRBEA's role is laudable in this regard".

We are grateful to the Hon'ble Minister for clearly articulating facts and his feelings.

The inaugurator **Dr. C. Rangarajan**, the doyen of central banking, an eminent economist and academician, former RBI Governor, ex-principal advisor to Prime Minister's economic council, and currently Chairman of Madras School of Economics, covered in brief "some aspects of the current economic scene". In view of the importance of his analysis we propose to circulate his entire speech later. What he stated is as follows, briefly:

- i) He recalled the mutually cordial relationship with the Association from the days he was in RBI, "even when we differed on some issues" and this relationship continued.
- ii) "RBI is an august institution.... The quality of service of any institution depends on the people who are part of it. This is true particularly of a service organization like RBI, Employers and employees are the two wheels of the organizational cart. Both must move synchronously and with the same speed.... You must recognize the unique nature of the institution that RBI is....."
- iii) Saying that central banking is evolving as the circumstances change and that "we cannot fight the problems of today with the tools of yesterday", he advised the unions to be in tune with the changing scenario, stating simultaneously that "RBI has accumulated a large amount of expertise and it should not be lost. "It should be utilized even if some activities are palmed off". He emphasized, ".... there will be a quantitative and qualitative change in the financial system and the tasks of RBI will raise manifold and the ability of RBI to handle these issues will depend on your skills, commitment and dedication".

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- iv) Dr. Rangarajan was worried that over the last few years, there has been a sharp decline in the quality of (commercial) bank asset. The gross non-performing advance ratio of scheduled commercial banks increased to 9.1%, and overall stressed advances ratio increased to 12.3%. "These are high levels..... The slowdown in growth itself causes distress".
- v) On demonetization, he says "demonetization cannot be a stand – alone measure". While "the measure has no doubt sent shivers down the spine of some, however, because of the shortage of new currency to replace the old, many have suffered. Small business, retail trade, vegetable vendors, fishermen, small businessmen and daily wage earners have suffered..... The immediate pain is real and tangible and sooner the phase comes to an end, the better for the economy. In short much of the controversy over demonetization could have been avoided, had the authorities been better prepared. It is the inadequate supply of new currency to replace old that has caused much of the storm".
- vi) On issues of autonomy Dr. Rangarajan enunciated pros and cons of the issue, quoting copiously from international experience. Also, he narrated how this issue developed in connection with RBI. He concluded that "Accountability goes with autonomy and accountability require clear enunciation of objectives or mandate. Institutional arrangements must be such as to enable the autonomous institutions to function independently. autonomous institutions with specific mandates are an integral part of democracy. RBI is one such institution in India. Its ability to perform its functions must not be compromised. Eternal vigilance is the price of autonomy".
- vii) He welcomes the concept of Universal Basic Income mooted in the Economic Survey, as the idea is to provide everyone a certain minimum income, which is universal in nature accruing to everyone. However, its economic implication in a country like ours with a population of 125 crores will be enormous. His advice, therefore, is that a consensus has to be built up on the issue by wide-ranging discussions.

Dr. G. Haragopal, former professor of Hyderabad Central University, our Chief Guest, eloquently dealt with the fall out of the neo-liberal policies that have brought innumerable sufferings on the common people of the country. He pointed out that the current growth model has led to the huge concentration of wealth in the hands of few people and neglected the millions, who are practically deprived of their justified due as a result of tremendous distortion in distribution system. So-called 'high' growth rate of 8% to 9% in Indian economy for years together has no positive reflection in the employment scenario as 60% of permanent jobs have been contractualised whereas during the so-called low growth regime there had only been permanent employment. Referring to the prevailing scenario of the country under present dispensation, Prof. Haragopal said the autonomous organizations that have been meticulously developed since independence are being dismantled purposefully to subserve the interests of the ruling class. In the wake of this desperate drive, the authority of Reserve Bank itself is being severely challenged, it is being gradually ciphered. While dealing with demonetization, Prof. Haragopal remarked that RBI Governor happens to be the guarantor of currency notes according to the Constitution of India. But the present Government has shamefully hijacked the power of the Governor in this domain. He called upon the Reserve Bank employees to come forward with patriotic zeal and commitment to save this premier institution for the sake of the nation.

In the Delegates' Session, the next day, in the morning of 18th February 2017, **Shri A. K. Sarangi**, the Chief General Manager-in-Charge of HRMD spoke on the current human resource development policy of the Bank – skilling the man power, intensive training, frequent management-employee interactions. He referred to wage settlements and hoped that this would pave the way for better mutual relationship and more commitment to jobs. He said the core values of RBI of service and dedication have to be inculcated and here precisely AIRBEA has a very important role. He opined that a strong trade union is an integral part of a strong institution. While mentioning about the issue of recruitment and other Human Resource issues he asserted that there should be a meaningful consultative process between the management and union for strengthening the institution. About recruitment, he assured entry of Class III cadre for the year 2016 to be completed by the month of May 2017 and for the year 2017 that would be completed by January 2018. "I always value the ideas and experiences of the Association leadership", says Shri Sarangi.

Ms. Susmita Phukan, General Manager, HRMD, greeted the delegates and wished the Conference a success. She expressed happiness to be a witness to the assembly of Association activists and leaders.

Shri R. Subramanian, the Regional Director of Telengana/ Andhra Pradesh was happy that the Conference of AIRBEA was decided to be held in Hyderabad and Hyderabad Office was glad to extend all co-operation to make the Conference a successful one. He says that this being the first Conference of AIRBEA in Hyderabad it is a matter of immense pleasure.

Coms. S. V. Mahadik, General Secretary, AIRBWF and **C. M. Paulsil**, General Secretary, AIRBOA emphasized on the united movement of Reserve Bank employees and officers under the banner of **United Forum of Reserve Bank Officers and Employees**. They have said that our unity is our strength and this united movement of ours have enthused all sections of staff and could clinch some important issues. However, the most pressing issues of Pension improvement/ Updation and Opening of Option remain pending, which are to be settled. The United Forum should meet soon to decide further course of action. They were applauded heartily by the whole house.

Messages from Governor, Dr. Urjit Patel, Deputy Governor, Shri S. S. Mundra, General Secretary, AIBEA, Com. C. H. Venkatachalam, General Secretary, CITU, Com. Tapan Sen were read out. Message from Vice-President, Hon'ble **Shri Hamid Ansari**, General Secretary, HMS were received later.

General Secretary, Bank Employees Federation of India (BEFI), **Com. Pradip Biswas** narrated the situation in the banking industry; the huge rise of NPAs, a few corporate houses grabbing bank loans and not repaying it, pushing banks to the brink, so much so that the net profit of banking sector has turned **negative**, creating huge uncertainty about next wage settlement in banks. He deplored Government's move for merger and acquisition of banks, which will be a recipe for disaster and declared that United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) were going on a day's strike on **28th February 2017** in protest. He emphasized on united struggle of all financial sector employees. He criticized Government's move on demonetization which, besides increasing the pains of common men, has served no purpose.

The General Secretary placed his report. Briefly going back to the recent past when AIRBEA was sought to be strangled by the twin attacks of no recruitment and mass promotions, AIRBEA fought bravely. Association was decimated, no doubt, but could not be scared. It was brought down to a minimum number to wreak vengeance, but it did not succumb. So, recruitment started after long two decades. He congratulated Association units for creating history, unparalleled in the annals of trade union movement in the country. He called upon the membership and association activists to recall their glorious past and look to future with confidence. General Secretary scanned the international and national scenario, particularly banking sector and central banks and narrated how peoples' money was squandered by corporate through banks, swindled by various measures, bringing in a catastrophic melt down in USA and Western combine through which financial system collapsed. But due to surveillance of Reserve Bank of India and bank unions, Indian banking system escaped the disaster. To save the corporate from bankruptcy, the Government elsewhere doled out public money thereby taking the burden of loss on Government exchequer, in the process corporate losses were socialized and they were bailed out. Then, in the name of reforms started the austerity measures. Workers lost their jobs, wages, housing, medical benefits, future savings, everything. There were revolt like situation in various countries. Due to loss of jobs and extreme poverty, the right wing elements are coming to the fore in various western countries and the dream of united Europe, united West etc. is evaporating fast; even democracy is in peril in countries like USA, Great Britain has exited from European Union. Divisiveness, rancour, religious bigotry are in ascendency.

He also narrated the attacks on working class and common people in India and united resistance by trade unions of which we have been a part. He appealed to Reserve Bank employees to realize the gravity of the situation and resist. He stressed that only the resolute, conscious, determined, united working class movement can ensure success and RBI staff must be a part of it. He said that we had been witness how democratic institutions were being dismantled and RBI had become a casualty. If RBI is to be saved from extinction, its workforce must come to the fore and Association units will have to provide the leadership. It is for the younger generation of membership who have to take upon themselves the mantle of leadership and they must be groomed for that. Association leadership everywhere must take up the challenge. Various challenging situations we faced in the past and every challenge further fortified our resolve. This cannot be different this time also. He praised RBIEA, Hyderabad for mobilizing so many young comrades for the Conference. If they can do, why not others too everywhere – he quired.

About 40 speakers took part in the deliberations. Discussions were lively, forceful. Many young comrades came to the dias to declare that they have learnt a lot from the Conference and the way it has been organized. They are going back with new enthusiasm. They assured the house of their whole hearted participation in Association activities and building up the proper atmosphere.

Meanwhile, on 18th February 2017 evening **Com. M. L. Malkotia**, ex-Secretary, AIRBEA and now Treasurer, CITU, acknowledged his debt to RBEA/ AIRBEA for learning about trade union. He said wage revision was important but much more important was job security, and workers are fighting so-called "labour reforms" to protect their jobs. He applauded Reserve Bank employees for fighting tenaciously both to protect jobs and the institution.

On 19th February 2017 morning **Shri Salim Gangadharan**, ex-RBI Regional Director took the podium and narrated in details how RBI is losing its important functions, how its authority is being diluted systematically and how now it stands bereft of its functional autonomy, which is highly regrettable for national interest. He said that RBI had to be saved come what may. **Shri R. N. Vatsa**, General Secretary, RBIOA greeted the Conference, fully endorsed United Forum writing to RBI Governor to save RBI's autonomy. He called upon all sections of employees and officers to mobilize on pension related issues.

Replying to deliberations on his report General Secretary said that some issues have been raised for immediately taking up with the Bank – that will be done. Some issues may form the part of the next Charter of Demands, which will be in process soon – those will form the part of the next Charter of Demands. He, however, said that the most pressing issue is pension related issue, which cannot wait any longer. The United Forum must start the process immediately and Association units as part of the United Forum must make preparations everywhere.

He criticized RBI management for withholding the legitimate dues of the employees for extended period of service on holidays and weekdays during demonetization drive. General Secretary also demanded immediate withdrawal of suspension orders in Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

The General Secretary's report was accepted unanimously with prolonged applause.

The audited accounts of AIRBEA upto December 2016 were placed and adopted unanimously.

Resolutions on - Anti-People Economic and Labour Reform Policy of the Government, United Struggle against Privatisation and merger of Public Sector Banks, The Autonomy and Authority of RBI, A.P.F. for post-2012 Recruits and Pension Updation and Opening of Option for Pension were placed and adopted unanimously.

The Conference decided to express solidarity with bank employees' strike action on 28th February 2017.

The Conference unanimously elected the Office-bearers, members of the Central Executive Committee and General Council of the Association for the next term. Their names are appended later.

The General Secretary referred to the untiring service of Com. G. Nageswar Rao, President of RBIEA, Hyderabad, an activist and organiser of the Association for decades, and the fountain-head of inspiration for the 32nd Conference of AIRBEA working day and night himself while enthusing others, and proposed that he may be honoured as permanent invitee to the main fora of AIRBEA, viz. CEC and General Council, which the whole house endorsed heartily.

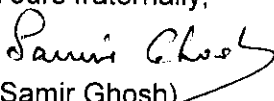
AIRBEA thanks all who have rendered assistance for the Conference. The Regional Director, the senior officers, Department of Human Resource Management, Estate Department, many officers who graciously donated for the Conference, brethren of Workers' Union and Officers Association, Retired employees – their contribution, we will gratefully remember.

Thus comes to the end the epoch making 32nd Conference of AIRBEA.

Let us march on, friends. Build up AIRBEA on a strong footing. Bring young, energetic leadership to the fore. Let us meticulously groom them. This is the task 32nd Conference of AIRBEA enjoins on us. Let us fulfill it.

With warm greetings,

Yours fraternally,


(Samir Ghosh)
General Secretary