

ALL INDIA  
RESERVE BANK  
EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION  
13, NETAJI SUBHAS ROAD  
KOLKATA-700 001

PHONE:(033)2210-4136  
2230-9232  
2243-9079  
Fax No. (033)2231-0885  
E-mail: [airbeahq@gmail.com](mailto:airbeahq@gmail.com)

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21<sup>st</sup> March 2023

### TO ALL UNITS & MEMBERSHIP

Dear Friends,

#### **33<sup>rd</sup> Conference of AIRBEA – 14-16<sup>th</sup> March, 2023, Kolkata** **- A landmark event, a guide to action, to strengthen the Association.**

AIRBEA on the threshold of centenary, one of the oldest trade unions in the country, held its 33<sup>rd</sup> Conference in Kolkata on 14-16<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

The inaugural session was held in the afternoon of 14<sup>th</sup> in the spacious Banking hall of RBI, which was filled to the capacity, decorated with banners and posters with an elegant backdrop with the photos of our leaders of yesteryears. RBI employees and retirees, bank employees, trade union leaders of various sectors, our well wishers comprised the audience. The cultural troupe of the host unit, RBEA, Kolkata, rendered four songs appropriate to the occasion. The inaugurator, labour friendly and pro-poor, ex-justice **Shri K. Chandru** of Madras High Court, and the Guest-in-Chief, **Prof. V K Ramachandran**, economist and Vice Chairperson of Kerala Planning Board were felicitated by **Coms. Ajit Subhedar**, President and **A Govindasamy**, Working President of AIRBEA respectively. General Secretary, **Com. Samir Ghosh** read out the messages for the Conference by, inter alia, ex-RBI Governors **Dr. C Rangarajan** and **Dr. Y V Reddy**, Central Trade Unions, CITU, HMS etc. and WFTU. Briefly he placed the background of the Conference that AIRBEA stood recognised by the Bank since Bank's formation in 1935, and acted responsibly in the interest of both the institution and the workforce. RBI's responsibility is to the teeming millions of the country, nation's economy and it is to act as adviser and guide to the Government on economic matters. AIRBEA have been opposing any interference from any quarters on these roles of RBI and will persist in this regard.

In his inaugural speech Justice Chandru narrated briefly how the working class struggles of the country moved both through the legal channels and struggles outside, But the judiciary hardly did any justice to the trade unions against Government policies. However, after independence, the working class achieved some legal rights including right to strike. Those very rights are under attack to-day through new labour codes. He criticised Government's silence on SBI and LIC's purchase of shares of Adani enterprises to the detriment of national interest. He said trade unions will have to fight in unison the policy of disinvestment of public sector. Prof. Ramachandran expressed his serious concern about the current state of affairs of Indian economy. He said what is most important is peoples' initiative. He cited examples of Kerala how the peoples' policy initiative along with trade unions have brought enormous changes in social and economic landscapes of Kerala, against untouchability, poverty, lack of education etc. He called for trade union movement to take up social issues.

Next day, the 15<sup>th</sup> March, delegates' session commenced at 10-30 A.M. with hoisting of the flag of AIRBEA by the President and Working President amidst full throated slogans of **AIRBEA ZINDABAD, LONG LIVE AIRBEA, RBI EMPLOYEES UNITY ZINDABAD, BANK EMPLOYEES' UNITY LONG LIVE** etc. Floral tributes were laid on the MARTYRS' COLUMN. Chief General Manager-in-Charge, HRMD, Central Office, **Shri Subrata Das** addressed the session, wishing the Conference all success. He called for mutual co-operation, healthy interactions on issues. While Bank is looking after employees' wage issues and other needs, like lease-rent etc., Bank is also careful about career progression, he said. He appealed to Bank's workforce to inculcate a reasonable, calibrated expectations and aspirations; never out of bounds. Shri Das was thanked by the General Secretary for coming despite personal difficulties. **Shri R. Kesavan**, Regional Director also wished the Conference a success. They were felicitated along with other leaders of RBI employees, viz., **Shri Jeet Pathak**, General Secretary, RBIOA, **Shri Gavin Coelho**, General Secretary, AIRBOA and **Shri R.M. Palande**, General Secretary, AIRBWF, **Shri L. R. Parab**, General Secretary, AIRBREA was also honoured. **Shri Bipin Nair**, DGM, HRMD, CO, was warmly welcomed. All the invited leaders spoke of strengthening employees unity and joint action on common issues. Some veteran comrades were invited for felicitation for their contribution to Association.



They were called to the dias and presented with mementoes by **Com. K K Sharma**, senior Vice President, AIRBEA. They are **Sarvashri Vilas Potnis**, MLC of Maharashtra Assembly, **V V Asai** (Nagpur), **M L. Malkotia** (New Delhi), **Sudipta Saha Roy** and **Swapan Ghatak** (Kolkata). **Com Debasish Basu Chodhury**, General Secretary of BEFI, a guest speaker, was felicitated and he spoke in details about banking sector and their issues.

The second session started with condolence resolution and observance of silence for those whom we have lost in the Bank, national and international arena, since our last Conference at Hyderabad in 2017 with particular reference to **Com. S V Mahadik**, General Secretary of AIRBWF, Chairman of Bharatiya Kamgar Sena, an MLA of Maharashtra Assembly, who was also a leading force to our UFRBO&E, as also **Com. Dulal Goswami**, Vice President of AIRBEA and President of RBEA, Guwahati. Their demise has made us poorer.

The General Secretary placed his report as approved by the outgoing CEC the day before. The report dealt with pertinent global and national situation, state of affairs in the banking industry, in RBI and our tasks ahead. He appealed to all delegates to read the report attentively along with supplementary documents for these contain a wealth of data and authentic reports about the situations around which we must know and disseminate amongst our membership for clear perceptions about our tasks ahead. He says that economic inequality, disparity, unemployment, poverty have touched all-time high both in India and abroad, leading to revolting reactions from distressed people. At the same time right wing political force are in ascendancy manywhere. A conscious trade union like us has to decide its tasks in that background as these developments do and surely affect us directly and indirectly. The report paid high encomia to bank employees' joint movement for decades against privatisation of public sector banks – they have gone on all-India strikes on 69 days – which is unique in the annals of trade union. General Secretary has emphasized that AIRBEA has been associated with this historic movement althrough and would continue to do so. He also reminded how the fraternity of bank employees fought tenaciously with several strike actions to enhance 2% wage increase offer to more than 15%, which has facilitated RBI wage increase too. The Report emphasized AIRBEA's three decades long struggle to oppose outsourcing of jobs, dismantling the Bank's departments and functions, which have brought the Banks' huge edifice to skeletal size, "leanest" central bank in the world, even though RBI is a full-service central bank. Elimination of RBI onsite supervision of banks has had disastrous consequences. AIRBEA have fought these assiduously. Simultaneously the Association firmly opposed dilution of RBI's authority and independence and efforts to metamorphose it into a mere wing of the Ministry of Finance instead of its statutory responsibility of guiding the Government on economic policies.

The report criticised Bank's discrimination against Class III staff vis-à-vis immediately higher cadre, even though computer savvy efficient Class III staff are discharging qualitatively higher responsibilities. Bank must review it and usher in a policy of rationality and reasonableness. While the external relativity has been taken care of substantially, the internal relativity suffers from serious inadequacy, which needs rectification.

The General Secretary drew attention of the House how a few misguided elements had been trying to weaken and wreck the Association from within with the help of anti-trade union political elements from outside. They are trying to disturb Association's functioning, spreading vitriol and vitiate the atmosphere. A section of Bank's officials are unfortunately acting in tandem with the disruptors. These must be firmly stopped by cementing members' unity and raising their trade union perception. That is the most important work of the Association now in all units and for that unit leadership everywhere must gear up and plug any loophole anywhere. Association must be an epitome of unity, honesty, trade union democracy, deterring the few anti-Association elements.

After deliberations by all units the report was accepted unanimously by the entire House with full throated prolonged applause; slogans like "**LONG LIVE AIRBEA**", "**AWAZ DO HUM EK HAI**" resonated again and again, displaying delegates' firm determination to hold high the Association's banner and ideals.

The audited Statement of Accounts upto December 2022 was placed by Treasurer, **Com. Biplab Das** and was accepted.

Resolutions on (1) **Against the codification of labour laws to exclude the workforce from genuine legal protection**, (2) **Against the Privatisation of Public Sector Banks**, (3) **On the autonomy and authority of RBI**, (4) **Our Demands**, (5) **On our Association and its unity**, (6) **NPS to be reviewed**, were passed unanimously.

The Conference unanimously elected Office bearers, Advisors, CEC and General Council members, which is a balanced amalgam of experienced seniors and dynamic young leaders. The lists are already circulated.

All Office bearers of AIRBEA spoke in the meeting, encouraging the participants and sharing with them their experiences for decades.

The President and Working President delivered rousing speeches, which were applauded by the entire audience. They also spoke highly of the arrangements by the host unit, RBEA, Kolkata for a successful Conference and sincere work by their activists.

Chairman of the meeting Com. Ajit Subhedar felicitated Coms. Alok Basu and Srirup Pathak for their dedicated indispensable services for AIRBEA office.

The newly elected CEC met for a while, decided to pursue remaining issues with the Bank and strengthen Association units.

In the end the cultural wing of the host unit presented a drama in Hindi, a comedy projecting the plight of the poor people, by famous Italian playwright, **Dario Fo**, "**Can't Pay, Won't Pay**", which was highly appreciated by the audience.

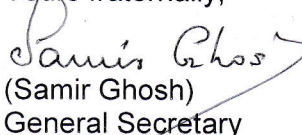
Thus came to an end the 33<sup>rd</sup> Conference of AIRBEA, delineating our tasks ahead.

Our journey forward continues unabated.

**LONG LIVE AIRBEA.**

With warm greetings,

Yours fraternally,

  
(Samir Ghosh)  
General Secretary