

Welcome moves by India and China

The tangible signs of rapprochement welcomed

SINCE the 1962 border war between India and China, the bench-mark year of the souring of relations between the two Asian giants, it had been one long winter of chilly bilateral discontent up until 1979. It was in that year that Vajpayee, as foreign minister of Desai government in the wake of a break with the tradition of continual Congress rule in India, visited Beijing with a forward-looking overture. The ice melted somewhat. But it would be for the Congress party government under Rajiv Gandhi to carry forward the process of de-freezing the ties with Beijing. And this time with Vajpayee visiting China as the prime minister of India, keen on leaving his mark on history, all the previous reference-points seem to have been surpassed in terms of achievement.

The patient, gradualist approach to improving ties straddling a process of de-freezing relations, getting these back to a normal working order, and then moving forward in diverse fields to add value to the overall relationship, has paid rich dividends. What is extremely important to note is that there has been a de-prioritisation of issues, beginning with the most torrid and intractable border disputes being set aside to make room for different other concerns of relationship where progress could be made easily. And this, with the possible concomitant benefit of creating an ambience for taking up some of the contentious issues downstream.

The Vajpayee visit to Beijing has yielded ten accords between the two countries envisaging expanded cooperation topped off by consultation in a wide gamut of arrears. There are many *firsts* in the score-card. This is for the first time that a joint declaration has been issued simultaneously from New Delhi and Beijing as a crowning culmination of the agreements signed which themselves number the highest ever between the two countries. The joint declaration besides being a maiden one is blissfully free from any diplomatic fudge in that it has kept from emphasising differences. Secondly, all future talks on the border issue stand upgraded from the level of technocrats to that of special political envoys reflecting thereby a new earnestness to tackle the problem with a combined political will — for the first time.

But what is remarkable about the quality of the outcome of Vajpayee's contacts with the new Chinese leadership is another first, a historic one at that. India has for the first time formally recognised Tibet as part of the People's Republic of China. Even though there is a nuanced interpretation that India differentiates between the Tibet autonomous region and the whole of Tibet, the Indian recognition of Chinese suzerainty there is regarded as a big step forward in coming to terms with each other on a delicate issue. With Dalai Lama wishing to see greater autonomy inside Chinese borders and hoping that the increasing trust between India and China could resolve what remains of the Tibetan issue, one can look forward to an early tripartite reconciliation in that region.

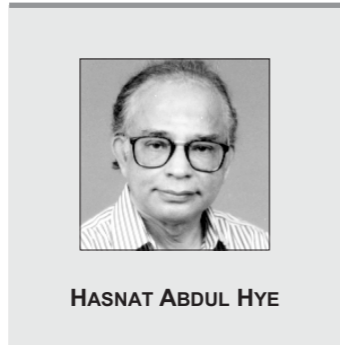
India doesn't come empty-handed either. As for the northeast Indian state of Sikkim, China has agreed to recognise the Nathu la frontier point as a 'border pass' between the two countries with bilateral trade poised to start through it any day. Many regard this as a *quid pro quo* for Indian recognition of Tibet as part of China.

India and China have set an example of how from a zero-sum game a dialogue between two historically and implacably inimical countries can be elevated to a point of effective value addition by taking up economic, trade and cultural cooperation issues ahead of the difficult outstanding problems that could wait without spelling end of the world for the two countries anyway.

The most creative part of the unfolding scenario of a rapprochement between Beijing and New Delhi is how they sought to soften the issue of border conflict by a give-and-take approach to resolving the differences over Tibet and Sikkim. In case of the latter, the designation of a border pass in Sikkim as a trading route by Beijing has meant a clear-cut recognition of the international border between Sikkim and China — at that point.

We are heartened to see India and China try and reconcile their differences in a gradient manner featured by maturity and statesmanship. Both Beijing and New Delhi being our close friends their progress towards better ties is welcomed by us. We are hoping their improved relationship would serve as a robust factor for stability in Asia.

Gram Sarkar



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

GRAM Sarkar will be a reality soon. This is the third attempt at developing local institutions at village levels in Bangladesh. The first initiative came with the Swanirvar Gram Sarkar Act of 1980, which envisaged village bodies to be set up in each village, independent of Union Parishads. The Gram Parishad Act of 1997, on the other hand, designed village organisations (Gram Parishad) as part of Union Parishads. Another difference between the two was in the definition of 'Gram Parishad'.

While the Swanirvar Gram Sarkar proposed one Gram Sarkar for each village, the Gram Parishad Act of 1997 made the village level body, the Gram Parishad, to be coterminous with the area of a ward of Union Parishad. This meant more than one village to be covered in a Gram Parishad.

The present Gram Sarkar Act has shed the prefix 'Swanirvar', perhaps both because of the need to keep it as an auxiliary body of Union Parishad and to get rid of the romantic idea of making each village 'Swanirvar'. In terms of structure it is similar to the one envisaged under the Gram Parishad Act of 1997.

Under both the Acts, ward and not a village, is the operational unit. It has the advantage of avoiding physical overlap in jurisdiction and giving the new unit a size that has potentials of economies of scale, to some extent. Above all, a ward-based village organization complements the Union Parishad, rather than exists parallel to it. It was the bureaucrats' solution to the complex issue of having a village body as required by political authorities. The fact of the matter is, irrespective of political parties in power, the government of the day would always want to have a local government system in its own

image. The reason is obvious. Local government bodies and community based organisations are conduit of whatever resources are channelled to the people at the grassroots. They can influence public opinion in favour or against in a significant way. The structure and composition of these local government bodies are important to political parties. That is why with every change of government there is a reappraisal and restructuring of local government bodies. This is encouraging in so far as it demonstrates continuing

civil servants. The politicians' compulsion is to strengthen their power base through development activities, particularly through resource allocation. The bureaucrats strive to accommodate this political requirement within the overall development frame work and a longer time frame. It is the bureaucrats' duty to be responsive to politician ministers' desires and directives but this is to be accomplished keeping the long term interests in view. To go for an independent tier of local government at the village level would have

with this hierarchical arrangement. It is gratifying that Gram Sarkar Act of 2003 has also adopted the strategy for the structure of Gram Sarkar and its source of financing. For once, there was no need to reinvent the wheels.

It is seen that the present Gram Sarkar Act has adopted the same structure as that of the Gram Parishad Act of 1997 which augurs well for support from the main opposition party. But the similarity between the two Acts ends here.

As regards composition of the

worker representative, two farm worker representatives, one freedom fighter, one teacher and one businessman. Officials from various government departments, financial institutions, cooperative societies, Ansars and NGOs will be non-voting members of the Gram Sarkar. This is a fairly large body, with members having disparate backgrounds and motivations. But more than the number of members, much will depend on the consideration for which they are selected and the manner of this selection. If the basis

been provided under the Gram Sarkar Act that Union Parishad will provide funds to a Gram Sarkar to operate its activities. The Gram Parishad Act of 1997 also made the same arrangement but it assigned only a few and very specific type of activities. The main function given to Gram Parishad was to convene two half-yearly meetings to propose a list of development schemes for consideration of Union Parishads and subsequently for feedback on the implementation of schemes approved. This planning function involves nominal expense but provides a realistic basis to local level planning. The other function given to the Gram Parishad was the registration of births and deaths. This being a statutory function of Union Parishads it was provided that required fund would be supplied by them. The other functions were implementation of schemes under the Union Plan falling in the jurisdiction of the Gram Parishad and maintenance of law and order. All these function and responsibilities have been assigned to the Gram Sarkar but many other functions have also been added. There is need for streamlining and rationalising these, as otherwise frustrations will become inevitable.

In the past too much emphasis was given on training the functionaries of local body for which donors were only too eager to provide funds. What they require most urgently are development of infrastructure (office), equipment and access to fund, local and external for development schemes. But even before that stage becomes relevant the Gram Sarkar requires a more concise and pragmatic list of activities to be undertaken by it. If the beginning is made with a modest role that requires a minimum of budget, it may pave the way for an enhanced role in future. Gram Parishad did not progress beyond legislation. Gram Sarkar is set to become operational within a few days. It carries a heavy load of expectations on its shoulders. The government can only fail at the cost of its credibility.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

IN MY VIEW

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interest by powers that be. But it is not conducive to the sustained growth of local government.

With the present resource base at local levels and potentially available centrally allocated fund, a village level organisation is not viable. But the political directive to have a village body has to be implemented, whatever the arguments against. The bureaucratic solution, proposed in the draft of the 1997 Gram Parishad Act, was found acceptable to the existing government and approved. The Gram Parishad instead of being an independent local government body was integrated with Union Parishad through the Wards. Through this provision the Ward members were given a role in the new organisation that coincided with their jurisdictions. By making him/her ex-officio head of the Gram Parishad the 1997 Act gave legitimacy and greater acceptability to the new organisation. Grouping all the villages in the Ward under the Gram Parishad also ensured cohesion and a reasonable territorial size for planning and implementation of schemes.

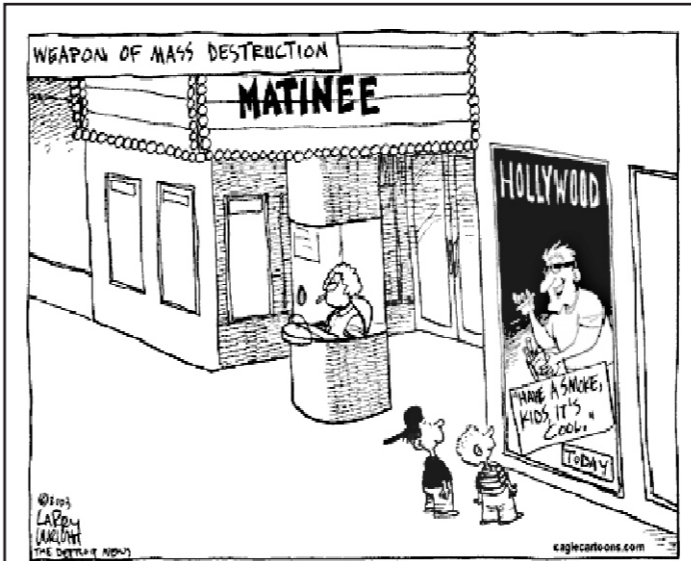
The Gram Parishad Act of 1997 is an interesting and significant case study on the collaborative relationship between political masters and

adverse impact on Union Parishad, both structurally and financially. So a compromise was found in this form of a ward level village organisation that would be seen to complement the Union Parishad and integrated into its existing structure. The provision that funds required for delegated function would be provided to the Gram Parishad by the Union Parishad was in conformity

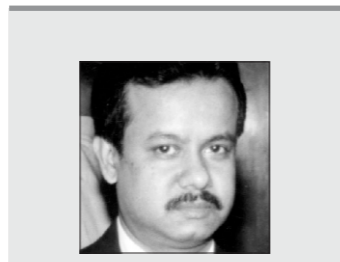
with the prevailing government opted for an arrangement between direct election and nomination. The provision under the present Act on the other hand, is clearly for nomination. The 13-member body of Gram Sarkar will have, besides the Gram Sarkar Proddhan (the Ward member), three women representatives, two farmers, one male VDP member, one

is solely on partisan considerations, then the credibility to the public will be weakened and acceptability to other parties will in all probability be found wanting. If the government has a short-term objective and goal in having these village level bodies, then of course, it can ignore reactions from other quarters. But if the objective is strengthening of the local government system, selection of the Gram Sarkar members will have to be, as much as possible, on non-partisan basis. According to many, this is asking for the moon. Looking at the brighter side, even under partisan dispensation, if Gram Sarkars are able to perform a meaningful role and make themselves useful to local people, they will have a chance of continuing in future without interruption.

The Gram Sarkar has been assigned many responsibilities and functions, many of which overlap with Union Parishad. Even if funds are available there will be duplication of activities between the two levels. But the crux of the problem will be lack of funds and limited resource base at the local level. As it is, even Union Parishads are exclusively dependent on government grants for development activities and also for administration. It has



Whims, eccentricities and perversions



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

ROMAN emperor Nero had a great sense of humor. He looted the shops below the Palatine and Aventine hills and then sold the stolen goods at auctions in his palace. He often made evening rounds in workman's rags and liked to stab one or two unwary Romans sitting in taverns. Whenever he floated on his barge across the bay at Baiae, or down the Tiber from Rome to Ostia, he ordered the shoreline brightened with temporary brothels. There, the noble ladies (wives of senators, jeweled courtesans, occasionally Nero's own mother) were required to applaud the music of his voice and solicit the favour of his person.

Nero sometimes offered what his uncle Caligula considered an amusing but prudent choice. He excused the debt of a courtier and allowed half of his estate to pass unblemished to his children on one condition: the courtier had to promptly commit suicide. The emperor reserved the other half of the estate to his own use. This was how he adopted the practice of whimsical confiscation. He seized the property of wealthy citizens in whom he discovered a flaw of character, an irritating mannerism, or an unwillingness to listen

to him play the flute.

There have been whimsical and eccentric men throughout history, but powerful men have set examples. The same Nero built a new palace for himself and stood in front of its gilded columns before he said that at long last he was going to live like a human being. The same Nero also said before he died that what an artist had perished with him. Here is one man who exceeded excess, who suffered from delusions, a megalomaniac humbug, who believed that the world belonged to him.

of life, whereas the other comes as a disruption. Whim is fancy but eccentricity is frenzy, one like a breeze and the other like a storm, both having to do with blowing wind yet each is different in speed and impact.

American journalist Heywood Broun used to say that every conviction begins as a whim. Perhaps it is true that every genius starts as a crank like every straight drive needs a few swerves. We have heard about philosophers, scientists and thinkers who did strange things under intellectual agitation. Archi-

Roman empress named Messalina was endowed with so ravenous a sexual appetite that she was capable of welcoming in a single night every member of the Praetorian Guard.

If we say that whim and eccentricity are compulsive expressions of impulsive behaviours, perversity comes in with a whole range of deviations. Mind it, whims and eccentricities don't have to be irregular behaviours. These could be regular behaviours happening at irregular intervals, less frequent than mannerisms, more frequent

Taken in their simple terms, whims and eccentricities are perverse when one person's urge for happiness can cause sufferings to another. There can be happy whims and happy eccentricities, but perversity is always a one way traffic. It hurts the victim, while exciting the victimiser, one person's pleasure hunt being nightmare to others. Perversity has its foundation in cruelty. The most ignoble of the Romans showed a rare liking for the taste and sight of blood. They found time in their busy schedule to poison their husbands, banish their wives,

cious hunger, insatiable lust and insurmountable cruelty exploding into a psychic disorder where excess became its own nemesis.

Keith Richards, a member of the Rolling Stones wanted to enter the U.S. for concert tours. In order to pass a blood test, he had a physician drain his own heroin-tainted blood from his body and replace it with transfusions from more normal people. Whims, eccentricities and perversions, all expand the course of imagination and people think of the unthinkable, endlessly pushing the horizon.

Perhaps the past societies handled their perversions through *Schadenfreude* such as public hangings, inquisitions and political persecutions. In the 17th century, Londoners sometimes spent their Sunday afternoons at Bedlam mocking the crippled and the demented. An 18th century London society figure named George Augustus Selwyn had a morbid interest in human suffering, which sent him scurrying over to Paris whenever a good execution was scheduled.

Whims, eccentricities and perversions are outcomes of our needs to release mental waste. Often, these are malfunctions of the mind created by genetic flaws or similar dysfunctions. Often, these are obdurate expressions of oblique propensities. Often, these are obdurate expressions of oblique propensities, which need to be satisfied like children who wish to go to a park, zoo or museum. The mind needs to breathe, and whims and eccentricities are open space where it goes for an occasional stroll. Perversity is when the mind chokes on that freedom because it has stayed out too long or gone too far.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

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The 3rd century Roman Emperor Elagabalus once on a whim sent his slaves to collect 1,000 lbs. of cobwebs. When they returned with 10,000 lbs., the emperor boasted that one could understand from that how great was Rome. In modern times, a Viennese artist named Rudolf Schwarzkogler decided to make a modernist artistic statement by amputating, inch by inch, his own penis, while the photographer recorded the process as a work of art.

There is basically a hairline difference between whim and eccentricity as there is between fasting and starvation. It's also like the difference between death and suicide. One is the logical con-

medes ran naked on the street, when he finally solved the puzzle in his bathtub. Van Gogh chopped off his earlobe in a state of frenzy and Marquis de Sade couldn't be at ease unless he applied his perverse mind to cause pain to women.

US President John F. Kennedy once confided in Russian Premier Aleksei Kosygin during their summit in Nassau that he got headache unless he had sex every day. He is said to have often seduced underaged girls, something that should shock the daylight out of many Kennedy lovers. Perversity is twilight between whim and eccentricity, where the mind wobbles between compulsion and reflex. A

than manners. But perversity can be of many frequencies, hourly, daily, monthly and so on. The legend of the werewolves has it that healthy-looking men would transform in the full moon. A perverse man will fancy for his impulses, which would turn into frenzy until he has satisfied it by foul means.

Think of a romantic man who wants to give a rose to a woman. If he wishes to serve the rose in a golden vase, it's a whim. But if he wishes to eat that rose in front of the woman, he is being eccentric. Again perversity is when he will force that woman to hold that rose in her hand, knowing that her grip is on the thorn and she would be bleeding from it.

and torture their slaves. They drank wine distilled from pearls, dined on peacocks and flamingos, and presented matchless gifts such as so many captive Gauls, Christians, Jews, etc. to the animals in the Colosseum.

One man's whim can be another man's eccentricity, but perversity hurts forever. An indulgence in whims and eccentricities can eventually lead to perversity, because the mind explores new frontiers as the road widens to accommodate more impulses. All the whims and eccentricities of the Roman aristocrats sharpened to perversions, their fleshly titillation and metaphysical phosphorescence, their vora-

OPINION

'Zoo tiger ... utopian story'

MOHAMMED ALI REZA KHAN

THIS has reference to the opinion expressed by the curator of Dhaka Zoo (The Daily Star 18th June 2003). My brief reply is as follows:

I wish Dhaka Zoo and other zoos in the country would remain abreast with the developments in the world of zoos and aquariums in all modern societies. I feel pity for my colleagues in the country. I hope they will start reading books and go through hundreds of internet sites that describe the techniques of zoo management and the principles followed for the release of any zoo or captive bred animal into the wilderness areas.

Safari park (in Dulahazra) is no more than a captive breeding centre with all animals kept in a denuded

forested habitat under fenced condition. Wildlife safaris are completely different than zoo safaris. In Africa, actually sections of wildlife sanctuary or national parks have been converted into safaris for the visitors. Their animals are not "fenced off" from the rest of their clans. Whereas Dulahazra one is a fenced area where animals of the Safari cannot or can never meet their wild counterparts. So, this safari is nothing but an "OPEN ZOO".

Bangladesh never had any lion in the country in the historical past. How one dares releasing such an animal species in the wild? No sensible person can even think about introducing an alien species into the country. Even Dhaka Zoo's Indian peafowl (formerly Common/Blue Peafowl) is not a pure breed or it is from any stock of

Bangladesh population of Indian peafowl. It's a hybrid with white and brown colours instead of the pure blue and blue related colours of the original species of the Indian peafowl. Such hybrids can never be released into the wild because of the restrictions imposed by the reintroduction group of the SSC of IUCN. Nobody knows the genetic makeup of either the Bengal Tiger, Nilgai or other specimens held by Dhaka Zoo. I understand our Dhaka Zoo tigers originally came from India and not from the Bangladesh Sundarbans.

My concern is only with releasing zoo or captive-bred animals into the wilderness areas of Bangladesh. I don't bother or simply care whether Dhaka Zoo, or in that matter any other zoo of the country, sends hundreds of their animals to another

zoo, captive breeding centre or fenced off safaris like the Dulahazra one in the country or abroad simply because that is what zoos round the world are doing. They are exchanging animals or giving some of these animals on breeding loan, educational loan and/or donations.

In view of Dhaka Zoo Curator's opinion published in your daily recently about the zoo world I like just to quote a recent press release issued by the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) on 5th June 2003 concerning the wild idea of releasing Lion from an Iraqi Zoo into the wilderness areas in Africa. WAZA's same view is applicable to Dhaka Zoo's expected misadventure of releasing tigers (and Lions!) in the wild areas of Bangladesh.

"World zoos and aquariums oppose dumping of lions and other species into the wild: In response to media reports on the planned transfer of Iraqi lions to game parks in South Africa, the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) and the Pan-African Association of Zoological Gardens, Aquaria and Botanic Gardens (PAAZAB) state their opposition in principle to the indiscriminate transfer and release to the wild of animals kept in human care. The two organisations emphasise that such actions must always be in keeping with the provisions of the relevant guidelines issued by the Survival Specialist Group (Species Survival Commission/SSC) of the World Conservation Union (IUCN). "From June 3 to 6, the Annual Meeting of the Pan-African Association of Zoological Gardens, Aquaria and Botanic Gardens (PAAZAB)

took place in Oudtshoorn, South Africa. The meeting was also attended by the Executive Director of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) and included a discussion on the uncontrolled importation of African wildlife species for the purpose of keeping the animals under semi-wild conditions or releasing them to the wild. Concerns were expressed to the local populations of wildlife. In addition to this, a genetic pollution of the original populations by animals of unknown or different genetic lineage would be possible if uncontrolled breeding with such individuals is allowed to occur. "According to the respective Codes of Ethics applied by both organisations no release-to-the-wild programme shall be undertaken without the animals having

undergone a thorough veterinary examination to assess their fitness for such release and that their welfare post release is reasonably safeguarded. Such assessment must be made in accordance with the quarantine and health screening protocols for wildlife prior to translocation and release to the wild issued by the Veterinary Specialist Group of IUCN. Following release, a thorough monitoring programme should be established and maintained. In addition, the IUCN/SSC/Reintroduction Specialist Group Guidelines for reintroduction must always be followed. This implies inter alia that only animals of known and demonstrable genetic status are returned to and released in a range state of the species.

"As a general rule the release to

the wild of animals bred by member zoos are the result of a coordinated and intensively controlled *ex situ* breeding programme. They are undertaken in compliance with the applicable legislation and guidelines, and in close cooperation with the local authorities and other stakeholders.

"If animals do not qualify for being included into such release-to-the-wild programmes WAZA and PAAZAB stress that other options must be vigorously investigated."

Dr. Reza Khan is Head of Zoo Section, Dubai Municipality, UAE.