

Reforms in China

China's 87-year old senior statesman Deng Xiaoping has started setting the stage for the crucial Communist Party Congress, scheduled for later this year, with a call to step up his campaign for economic reforms. In effect, it is a tough call, since he warns that opponents of his programme would be "removed", a hint that the Congress would not only work out a programme but also make some dramatic changes in the party leadership for next five years. In this context, the position of Prime Minister Li Peng whose political future has been uncertain for quite a long time due to his ambivalent attitude towards reforms would become a subject of new speculation.

The warning from Deng comes in the form of a commentary in the Shanghai-based Liberation Daily, published under the pen-name of a reformist writer who, it is said, generally reflects the views of Deng. In this particular article, opinions of the Chinese leader incorporate his utterances made during an inspection tour of Beijing's Capital Iron and Steel Complex in May. Why the Shanghai daily took more than six weeks to publish the commentary may be a mystery. It probably waited for the death last week of Li Xianin, a conservative former president of the state, who, even from his sick bed, had led the campaign of hardliners against Deng's reforms. With the passing away of Li, it remains to be seen as to who will take up the leadership of the anti-reform school. Hopefully, the campaign to step up the liberalisation programme at the Congress will go as planned by Deng, without running into a rough weather.

The reform programme, as outlined in the commentary, is just as wide ranging as one could expect from Beijing at this time. It talks about the setting up of stock markets and of "profound changes in politics, society, science and technology, culture and other fields." It even predicts important changes in people's behavioural norms, life styles, consciousness, values and sense of right and wrong.

Just from one commentary, it is hard to say how far Deng is prepared to go in creating what one might call, a "new China" that stands at the threshold of the 21st century, ready for the annexation of Hong Kong into the mainland. The commentary may well be a way of testing the water, preparing the public opinion inside the country, placating the capitalist mood in Hong Kong and assuring the outside world, especially the donor nations, that Beijing will not deviate from the market-oriented economic reforms.

In coming years, China may well succeed in achieving many of these objectives, if not all. The big question still remains, how far would Deng like the Congress to go in the field of political reforms? The commentary offers several hints that the subject is not far from the mind of the senior Chinese leader. In fact, it may well be — indeed, it should be — very much on Deng's agenda. For instance, the commentary calls for the "full embrace of market forces and a shift from the repressive attitude that followed the military suppression of the 1989 Tiananmen Square pro-democracy movement." To the outside world, all this is most welcome as much as it should be to the people in China who look for a new political climate. No one should expect the changes to come too suddenly or through one party congress. However, it will certainly mark a new beginning if the process is set in motion in the right direction and a leadership that is fully committed to reforms, political and economic, takes control in Beijing.

A Sad Sight

A photograph from Kuala Lumpur that appeared in several of our newspapers on Wednesday showed a "Bangladeshi woman, begging with child in her arms" on the pavement of the Malaysian capital. The picture, released by an international wire agency, must have come as a shock to our readers. However, it must also have raised a number of questions in many minds. The main question is about the nationality of the woman sitting on the pavement.

Some years ago, a responsible Kuala Lumpur daily had reported the presence of what the reporter described as "Bangladeshi beggars" seen in one of the state capitals, a report that had justifiably caused concern to our High Commission in Kuala Lumpur. The enquiry by the Bangladesh mission proved abortive, since the beggars had disappeared from the scene soon after the report had been published.

Since the communication between Bangladesh and Malaysia is only by air, it is hard to believe that a beggar woman, with a child in arms, can board a plane in Dhaka, pass through the immigration with a passport, and head for Kuala Lumpur. On the other hand, it is quite possible that the woman may well be the abandoned wife of an illegal immigrant from Bangladesh or any other South Asian country. The possibility that she may be from Myanmar of mixed Burmese-South Asian origin who has entered Malaysia by road, also cannot be ignored.

The photograph that shows a smartly dressed Malaysian woman walking by highlights the growing disparity that today exists among Asian countries, the economic deprivation of some in sharp contrast to the affluence of others. On this subject, our sensitivities have been dulled by things we see in our everyday life, especially within our own country. The fact that instead of exporting skilled manpower to a country like Malaysia, we may be now sending out "beggars" to sit on the pavement in Kuala Lumpur may no longer come as a shock to many after some time. Let us hope this does not happen. Let us also hope that the beggar woman in the photograph in question is not from Bangladesh. But, then, does it really matter where she comes from?

A senior Syrian diplomat told me some time ago that Likud and Labour are only two sides of the same coin thereby indicating that no revolutionary change in Israeli policies, with regard to the Palestinians, can be expected from any of the political parties in Israel. Similar views were expressed by some radical political leaders of the Arab world immediately after the Israeli election last month. They are right if their views are considered in the context of Palestinian demand for an independent Palestinian state west of Jordan river. But there is no doubt that the recent Israeli general election, ousting the Likud Party of power after 15 years of its rule and opening up the real possibility of putting Labour into power, has changed the Israeli politics almost radically. One may now see some ray of hope in the Arab-Israeli relationship.

Curb on Jewish Settlement

The most radical change is likely to be in the area of Jewish settlement in the occupied territories. Yitzhak Robin, the Labour leader, has already pledged curb on the "political" settlement in the occupied territories. Halt in the Jewish settlement is extremely crucial for the Palestinians. Here the firm stand of the United States on settlement policies leading to the refusal of the Bush administration of \$ 10b in the Loan Guarantees to Israel seems to have played an important role.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir indeed had a vicious plan — a plan to prolong the peace negotiations for at least a decade which would have enabled Israel to bring in demographic changes in the occupied territories through rapid Jewish settlement. Shamir divulged his secret plan in a recent press interview where he also mentioned about his final retirement from politics, he said he was at the end of his "personal road." Bush administration officials feel that the Labour government headed by

LABOUR'S WIN IN ISRAELI ELECTION

Is Middle-East Peace Nearer?

Yitzhak Robin who opposes "political" settlement in the occupied territories "will bring a welcome new spirit as well as a new policy to relations with Washington."

Apparently, Israeli public opinion also recently moved towards definite accommodation to Palestinians — some concession on land for peace, otherwise there could not have been so significant change in the Israeli politics giving Labour a wide margin in the general election. Indeed, since mid-80s Polls have shown "slow but steady increase in the percentage of Israelis willing to trade at least some

of the captured Arab territory for peace." It was evident from the election result of an important settler party, Tehiya which filed to get even a single seat in the Israeli Parliament though it won three seats in the 1988 election. Even the

majority of the American Jews are more comfortable with the Labour Party's policies on settlements and the peace process than with those of Shamir and his Likud bloc, and therefore will welcome the change in Israel.

Indeed, Robin has already stated that he would try to reach an agreement with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza on self-rule within nine months. "This was unthinkable under Likud Government. Shamir only spoke of Municipal elections and garbage collection autonomy."

Peace Negotiations

Though the Arab world reacted cautiously, there is a general feeling that there would be "unfreezing" of position on both Arab and Israeli sides in the peace negotiations. However, Robin's position on three principles which mark the points of agreement between Likud and Labour are known: no acceptance of a Palestinian state, no return to Israel's 1967 prewar borders, and insistence on "Israeli sovereignty over a united Jerusalem. In the peace negotiation which is likely to be convened soon after the Labour government takes over, all efforts must be made to make progress keeping in view these positions but within the overall environment of new feeling and understanding that is likely to emerge under Robin's leadership. Labour government would have the "free hand to implement the Labour Party's dramatically different policies on the occupied territories. More broadly, an Israeli government committed for the first time since the 1970s to the principle of exchanging captured territory for peace could galvanise the political atmosphere in the Middle East..." It is an option for a different Middle East. It is all up to Robin now. Potentially, we could see revolutionary change — the total collapse of the "greater Israel" concept that Likud has insisted on all these years. Said Dedi Zucer, a Legislator from the Meretz Party. Again the continued firm

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Muslehuddin Ahmad

Worries of the Jewish Settlers

Labour Party's win in the general election has created worries among the Jewish settlers in the occupied territories. "Everyone was down and depressed when they heard the results of election..." said a settler in the West Bank. Nearly 110000 settlers now live in the occupied territories though many of them live in temporary houses. This number would have swelled up if Shamir had remained in power. Robin said he would divert all funds from the settlers' account to housing within Israel. Jewish settlement in the occupied territories has created some negotiating advantage for the Palestinians as they would now be in a position to bargain against the Palestinians who have the right to go back to their homes in Israel or get suitable compensations.

Palestinian Autonomy

Though Yitzhak Robin opposes any idea of an independent Palestinian state, he already made statement in favour of Palestinian autonomy apparently as envisaged in the Camp David and general election in the West Bank and Gaza for electing a Palestinian authority that can take charge of Palestinian "self-rule" except probably defense and foreign

Flexibilities Needed for a Break-through

Possibilities exist for a break-through even against the three principles enunciated by both Likud and Labour, namely "no acceptance of a Palestinian state, no return to Israel's 1967 prewar borders, and Israeli sovereignty over a united Jerusalem."

Israel may not agree to the existence of an independent Palestinian state but agreement could be reached to create an independent Palestinian state which could immediately have confederation with Jordan. But the declaration of an independent Palestinian state even if it is for a minute is essential as the Palestinians are entitled to it under their right to self-determination. The ultimate political fate of the confederated states should be left to themselves.

On the question of "no return to prewar borders" no flexibilities exist for allowing Israel to retain an agreed area of occupied land bordering Israel that can work as the security zone. Such zone should be under the control of the UN for an agreed period.

The status of Jerusalem, definitely a sensitive issue, could also be determined if both sides are prepared to be flexible enough. Peace negotiations could seriously look into the possibilities of working on the much talked about ideas of declaring Jerusalem as the International City for all three religions to be administered by a special Administrative Body of representatives from the same religions under the UN supervision. These ideas, once looked utopian, may indeed now form the basis for negotiations if parties concerned are genuinely interested in peace in the Middle East.

How Israel voted

Left bloc	1992 62 seats	1988 55
Labour	45	39
Meretz	12	10
Hadash (ex-Communist)	3	4
Arab Democratic Party	2	1
Progressive List for Peace	0	1
Right bloc	41	47
Likud	32	40
Tsomet	7	2
Moledet	2	2
Tehiya	0	3
Religious parties	17	18
Shas	7	6
National Religious Party	6	5
United Torah Jewry	4	7
Total	120	120

Police Racism Hinders Justice for Australian Aborigines

A recent study by the Sydney University shows a shocking 80% rise in Aboriginal prisoners in New South Wales (NSW) plus 24 more deaths in custody since the establishment of the Black Death in Custody Royal Commission two years ago.

Recently, the Federal Aboriginal Affairs Minister Robert Tickner presented an AS150 million package to parliament to redress some of the major concerns raised in the Royal Commission report, while Amnesty International sent a team to Australia in April to examine the adequacy of this government response.

This package was presented amidst national controversy following an Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)-TV documentary which exposed police racism and double standards towards black Australians and the enactment of a draconian juvenile crimes act in March by the Western Australian (WA) state government, which the Federal Government has pointed out is in clear breach of Australia's international treaty obligations.

The background to the enactment of this act is a series of high-speed car chases in WA over the last 12 months in which 11 people were killed. The drivers of these stolen cars were all under 18 years and predominantly Aboriginal. Demonstrations by as many as 20,000 were held in Perth demanding "tough action" against these offenders. In an election year the state government was quick to act.

Though Aboriginal children are only an estimated 4.3% of the WA population, 70% of approximately 100 children in custody in the state are Aboriginal. Thus this has raised concerns among human rights groups that the country's most disadvantaged people are being targeted by the act.

If a young boy or girl commits an offence four times they will face up to 10 years in prison," Robert Bropho, an Aboriginal elder from the Swan Valley community in WA, told IPS. The government hasn't given proper assistance to pre-

vent Aboriginal kids getting into the situation they're right now.

Mr Bropho points out that wayward white kids have got hostels and controlled areas where they can go to for help, like food and shelter. If you ask the WA government to show where the rehabilitation places for Aboriginal kids are, there's little or nothing to show," he says, adding "when we offered them a plan, they said it will not work and cost too much money, without even trying it out."

Some of the state's leading legal and judicial voices have called for the act to be scrapped. These include the President of the Children's Court Hal Jackson who said that the law was flawed and open to terrible abuse of power by the Police.

Judge Jackson told a parliamentary committee that the definition of a violent offence for which a juvenile could be sentenced to 18 months jail, which the Police too much power. The worst part of this legislation is that it gives Police virtually open slather as to how they charge people.

The WA government argues that the legislation has been meticulously drafted to ensure that it is aimed only at those repeat and serious offenders and it would create a deterrent against continued offending.

Aboriginal groups have pointed out that serious offences under the act may include blowing smoke in a policeman's face, spitting on a policeman's shoes or clothes or a 10-year-old boy touching a girl on the outside of her dress below the stomach.

In a letter to the WA Attorney-General Joe Berrinson in early February, the Federal Attorney-General Michael Duffy warned that the bill will place Australia in breach of its international obligations under the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ratified by Australia in 1980) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by Australia in 1990).

Kalinga Seneviratne writes from Sydney

Police racism against black Australians, already a serious problem, will be exacerbated by such laws as the recently enacted juvenile crimes act by the West Australian government.

Former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam recently urged the Federal Government to use its legislative powers to override the WA legislation. The Labour government in WA inherited a police force which had a racist component," Mr Whitlam told an Aboriginal Legal Service gathering in Sydney. "It has not succeeded in eradicating it. Senior police officers, in defiance of their Commissioner, pursue a policy of preemptive harassment," he said.

Racism against black Australians among the police force is not only restricted to WA. It was also exposed by the recent ABC-TV documentary shot in the urban Aboriginal community in Sydney's Redfern. Later on ABC-TV also screened a video clip of a Police party in Northern NSW, where white policemen painted in black mocked an Aboriginal hanging, which moved Prime Minister Paul Keating to call it a "national disgrace."

The ABC-TV documentary "Cop 'n Sweet" accompanied the Police on a regular beat of the Redfern area. It had a most telling ending when the Police arrested an Aboriginal person in the street for swearing at them under the offensive languages act, when the Police themselves have been using similar language among themselves during the beat.

Ironically, one of the recommendations of the Royal Commission report was to repeal the state offensive languages act, under which many Aborigines get arrested including some who died in custody. In NSW anyone convicted under the act is liable to an A\$600 fine or three months jail.

According to Mr Brian Hancock, a solicitor with the Aboriginal Legal Service, the law gives Police an open ticket to

arrest Aborigines. It's absurd, it's like a joke. But in outback NSW, there's an Aboriginal person being arrested virtually every week for swearing," he says.

Presenting the government response to the Royal Commission report, Mr Tickner told parliament, Those who died were not victims of en-

trenched and institutionalised racism and discrimination.

Three-quarters of the AS150 million government package to redress Aboriginal injustices will be channelled through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, most of whose members are elected by the Australian black community. This includes A\$50 million for legal services, A\$7 million over five years to set up Aboriginal Youth Bail Hostels as an alternative to police custody, A\$5 million to create Aboriginal employment opportunities in the Police Force and Prisons

system and the appointment of an Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner, who will compile an annual State of the Nation Report on the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The government will be presenting another plan within three months to address the more fundamental problems of Aboriginal social and economic disadvantage. - Third World Network Features/IPS

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OPINION

The Situation in CHT

The Chittagong Hill Tracts is a turbulent area of Bangladesh. Today, a sense of resentment marks the hearts and minds of most of its inhabitants. This situation has been brought about over the past one and a half decades by rather a sustained policy of discrimination, disparity and negligence, culminating even in repression.

In early sixties Kaptai Dam was established resulting in the destruction of the homes and livelihood of over 100,000 persons, all members of the Chakma community. Again in 1972, after independence, the separate ethnic identity of the hill people was constitutionally subsumed within the concept of the "Bengali nation."

The Constitution of Bangladesh, in Article 28 (1), guarantees that there will be no discrimination by the State against any citizen on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Nevertheless, discrimination continues. Sometimes, censorship of the local and national media and also misrepresentation of the situation in the CHT ensures that the real picture of the area is never communicated to the people of Bangladesh living in the plains.

As seen and reported, the population of the Hill Tracts has been forcibly resettled. Displaced from their own lands, men and women are being made to live in the so-called "cluster villages." These are little better than concentration camps — their inhabitants are almost prevented from practicing their occupations, being unable to cultivate their own lands or to travel to nearby markets at will. Inhabitants of these villages have been made dependent upon government rationing, which is irregularly and arbitrarily distributed.

In 1986, hundreds of hill people were killed in the riots instigated by certain quarters and thousands were forced to take refuge in camps across the border. Their lands were deliberately resettled, in violation of the then existing laws, with plains people who had been left homeless following the destruction of their lands in river erosion. Bengali set-

tlers in the CHT have allegedly been armed, and are also responsible for repeated outbreaks of violence against the hill people.

One of the inevitable results of these changes are the periodic massacres which occur in the CHT. The most recent of these is the reprisal killing of hill people on 10 April, 1992 in Logang village, of Panchari Upazila under Khagrachari district sparked off by the killing of a young Bengali cowherd at the hands of miscreants. The authorities initially prohibited all journalists and non-residents from traveling to the spot. The national media were fed reports that the killing was the act of the Shanti Bahini. But a more disturbing version of the events was discovered by journalists and human rights activists later on and the cause of killing was published in the newspapers.

Article 29 (1) of the Constitution states that "There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic" and Article 29 (2) states that "No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office in the service of the Republic." At present access to higher education — medical or engineering — is seemingly impossible without clearance from the military authorities. Similar restrictions exist with regard to public sector jobs.

The Rule of law should prevail in a democratic state and the Supreme Court should play the principal role in this regard. In the Supreme Court, many cases involving hill people, including numerous detention cases under the Special Powers Act, 1974, are currently pending. Most of these involve the illegal detention of hill people on the vague and unsubstantiated allegations that they are "members of the so-called Shanti Bahini" etc. As with other cases of illegal detention, the High Court has in a number of instances issued orders for their release. However, it is found that in a number of cases, where hill people have been detained,

their detentions have continued despite the issuance of such order. A particular authority is found to take the detenu into their custody following their release, to retain them in detention indefinitely, in gross disregard of the court order. Lawyers conducting such cases have also come to know that a number of hill people both students and eminent members of the community, have been charged with treason under Sections 121 and 124 (a) of the Penal Code purely because they have been engaged in campaigning or carrying leaflets regarding the rights of the community or of having leaflets with them. Similar treatment were meted out to political activists who campaigned for democracy during the years of autocratic rule.

How can the Bengali nation, whose history is marked by the Language Movement of 1952, the Education Movement of 1962, the Six Points of 1966 and the People's Movement of 1971; whose martyrs include Khudiram, Surja Sen, Barkat, Salam, Asad and Matur; whose liberation was won at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives tolerate this continuing injustice? Democratic Bengalis who have struggled against autocracy cannot accept this.

Hundreds and thousands of Burmese refugees poured into Bangladesh as a result of the oppression of the Burmese military junta. Our Government, political parties and people have stood by them. Why are we not moved by the cry of the hill people living so close to the Burmese refugee camps? Are their problems not our problems? Are they not our own people? If we want a solution to this problem we must come forward to reach a settlement based on coexistence between hill people and the people of the plain land. The question must be raised in Parliament and the hill people must be allowed to express their grievances and seek a solution within the national political framework, through the parliamentary process.

Adilur Rahman Khan
Advocate, Supreme Court.
Dhaka.

To the Editor...

Tin Bigha and other issues

Sir, At last Tin Bigha is free. Our heartfelt congratulations to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, Indian Premier Narasimha Rao and West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu.

The bamboo curtain erected by some short-sighted Indian leaders after Bangladesh-India Land Boundary Agreement of May, 1974 has been demolished by the Supreme Court of India and the Tin Bigha corridor has been formally leased out to Bangladesh legally and constitutionally. 26th June, 1992 is a red letter day in the history of Bangladesh-India relations.

Although even after eighteen years of stalemate, suspense and dilemma New Delhi could not implement in full

the 1974 agreement, the patience and the tolerance of the people of Bangladesh know no bound. We hope India would fully appreciate our stand and compensate us adequately for our loss in Tin Bigha by solving the Ganges River water sharing and Talpatty issues expeditiously with fortitude and sagacity.

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Speed-brakers

Sir, Accident has become a daily affair. Everyday we find news of street accidents in the dailies. Most of the accidents occur due to careless driving, tendency of overtaking, and overloading. Most of our vehicles are not road worthy. In order to prevent accidents, speed-brakers should be built in particular areas of Chit-

tagong city to decrease the speed of vehicles. The most important sites are Ctg. Medical College, Ctg. College, Mohsin College, Dr. Khastagir School, Saint Mary's School and Nasirabad Boy's High School. Thousands of students come to these institutions to acquire knowledge. It is very difficult for students, guardians and teachers to cross the roads in time.

Under the circumstances, the respective authority should at least take proper step to build speed-brakers in those areas of Chittagong city and thus save the valuable lives of the future citizens and provide the guardians a relief from tension.

Bhagya Dhan Barua, Md Mozibul Hque, Md Jamal Uddin.
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