

Pressure on China

Even before assuming his office, the US president-elect, Bill Clinton has started sending significant signals to China, indicating that his administration will place human rights concern ahead of trade. In this respect, by far the strongest signal came during the election campaign when the Democratic candidate had suggested that the most-favoured-nation (MFN) trading status for China should be linked to the country's record on human rights, a record that Washington regards as unsatisfactory. With Beijing enjoying a massive trade surplus with the United States, as much as \$18 billion in 1992 up from about \$13 billion last year, the possible refusal of the Democrat-dominated Congress to renew the MFN status for China in June would certainly be a blow on Beijing's economic programme.

China's concern over the new US administration's attitude towards Beijing goes far beyond trade matters. Reports from impartial sources suggest that there is suspicion growing in the Chinese capital that the West, especially the United States, may be trying to destabilise the country's socialist system. This suspicion is fuelled by the sale of arms to Taiwan by the United States and France, the move by Britain to increase democracy in Hong Kong and meeting between exiled Dalai Lama and some Western leaders. There is little doubt that some of these moves, especially the arms sale to Taiwan, are provocative, while others, like the pro-democracy measures in the colony, should have taken place after due consultation between London and Beijing.

How strong is the suspicion in Beijing about Western intentions is indicated by Lee Kuan Yew, the senior Minister of Singapore, and a frequent visitor to China. According to this astute observer of Asian affairs, the authorities in Beijing "believe that the West want to break up China, like the Soviet Union." The Singapore leader considers China's suspicions about a Western conspiracy as "paranoiac" but he is convinced that nothing should be done to weaken the unity in the vast socialist state. As he put it in a recent interview to a Hong Kong paper, "If that unity is broken, they (leaders in Beijing) believe China would split up. And they may well be right."

It is far from clear if the US president-elect Bill Clinton and his team appreciate the possible consequences of strong signals they are sending to Beijing on human rights issue. If they don't, they may well be making things difficult in Washington-Beijing relations even before the new administration has taken office.

How China will react to these signals remains to be seen. There is a fear that if it is convinced that the West is determined to undermine its system, say, by arming Taiwan, it may take the road to confrontation against the West and its allies in Asia and move away from regional co-operation. On this ground alone, countries in Asia, from Japan to Pakistan, would be opposed to attempts by the United States to dictate to Beijing on its internal matters, beyond perhaps using subtle secret persuasion with China to improve its human rights record. While we may all want China to move on the road to democratic reforms, no one should overlook the success achieved by Beijing in the field of market-oriented economic changes, the kind of success which the former Soviet Union failed to bring about before embarking on its history-making political reforms. It is important that nothing is done from outside to weaken the process of on-going changes in China, because such a move would only strengthen the hardliners in Beijing who are still trying to put the clock back in political and economic fields. Clinton should give Beijing a year or two to decide on its own time schedule for political changes, before putting on pressure on the Chinese leadership.

Sporting Glory

If smashing of games records is any indication, the fifth Bangladesh Games that concluded on Friday can be considered quite a success. No less than 49 records, including one South Asian Federation Games record in swimming, were set in the eight-day sports meet. Compared to the standard achieved by our sportsmen and sportswomen at the last meet, this year's is definitely an improvement. But figures may also be misleading. The shattering of just one South Asian mark is what really matters in a significant way; for all the other records fall way behind the international standards. We have had our own brand of sporting queen and king to emerge at the competition but the key question is if their standards are anywhere near the Asian marks, let alone the Olympic or World marks.

It is on this count that our sports arena cuts a really sorry figure. Sure enough, any occasion of the tumbling of old records is comforting not only for the performers but also for all who watch them to fall. The falling of our national marks are no exception. But at the same time it is equally true that we cannot find enough to cheer about when we pit the best of our performances even against the mediocre of the sporting nations' athletes. Our failure to excel in even a single discipline is indeed pathetic. Athletic skills are not everything; genius, training and perseverance play a great role in the making of super stars.

Now the question may be asked if athletes in the West, East Europe and Africa have a natural superiority over their counterparts in the East. That it is not has been amply proved by the domination of players from China, Indonesia, Malaysia and the two Koreas in sporting events like badminton and table tennis. In squash too it is the Pakistanis who have reigned supreme for a long time. The sub-continent had, moreover, basked in hockey glory for a long time until the initiative was wrested by others with the introduction of the astro turf. But the most tangible proof against the myth of any racial or other superiority is the Chinese assault in the Barcelona Olympic on the disciplines so long considered a European and American—or at best Pacific—preserve.

If physical fitness is the issue, some of our athletes can surely achieve it through tough regimen and systematic training. The important point is to bring the best out of the players and athletes. To do that we must have a national policy to have an elaborate sporting system. Catching them young is what remains at the root of all sporting rules and the best use of the potential is responsible for bringing fame in sports for the individual and the nation.

SAARC at the Crossroads: Need for Fresh Thinking

THE postponement of the SAARC summit is taken by many people as a minor irritant, a passing phase which will be forgotten, once the summit is held in January. The dazzling ceremonies and the splendours of state functions will, it is expected, create the illusion that we are back to the normal state of affairs. One wonders if such optimism is justified. In my view, something very basic has been missing from SAARC and the Babri mosque episode and its repercussion throughout South Asia has brought this missing factor into sharp focus. This, therefore, may be the right time for a fundamental and objective review of the regional body. We must not delude ourselves into believing that what we need is a few more summits. The pomp and circumstance of a conference of heads of governments cannot be a substitute for mutual trust. This, I am afraid, is what is missing from SAARC today. In the absence of trust there is no genuine goodwill and spirit of cooperation. The Babri mosque destruction, brutal as it is, is a cruel reminder that there is a gulf still separating the nations of the region which our statesmanship and vision has not yet been able to bridge.

As the Foreign Secretary in the late seventies when SAARC was born I had written the original paper setting out the rationale for a region organisation in South Asia. Earlier, in the middle sixties, I had served in Teheran as a Director of RCD—Regional Cooperation for Development. This organisation was set up by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey when CENTO, the US-sponsored anti-Soviet military alliance collapsed. RCD (now renamed ECO) has been, until it was transformed recently with the admission of the central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union, a failure but the experience of serving for two years in its secretariat was most valuable for me. I had also

the opportunity to witness, during my subsequent assignment in Jarkarta, the operation of another such body called IPEC. This body was formed by Pakistan and Indonesia in the middle sixties. This one also faded away in a few years' time. So I had no illusions about the difficulties and complexities of harmonizing national interest and building up regional consensus on certain issues of common concern. While bilateral relations can change with the passage of time and the changing alignments in international relations, regional cooperation has to be based on more enduring foundations. Such cooperation is usually rooted in a common geographical area, perceptions of long term common interests and historical and cultural affinities. It is relatively easy to prove by academic analysis that economic cooperation will benefit the countries. But that is not good enough for successful regional cooperation. Centuries of bitterness and distrust cannot disappear simply because of the expectations of some material benefits.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

did not lose faith. Prof Shamsul Huq, a wise and a patient man, worked painstakingly at the political level to bring about an understanding on the proposal. Finally, after a period of intensive diplomatic effort, the first meeting of the seven countries was organized in Colombo in April, 1981. I had the honour to attend this meeting representing Bangladesh.

History tends to magnify the success and ignore the frustrations and setbacks one faced on the way to success. The Colombo meeting—the first of its kind, was perhaps the most difficult diplomatic exercise that I have gone through. It was not certain, till the last moment, that we would succeed in issuing a joint communique at the end of the meeting. However, our patience paid off and we reached an agreement on the basis of a common minimum programme. Some of the most important subjects were ex-

cluded from the scope of SAARC. Trade and industry, for example, were considered too sensitive for consideration in the SAARC forum. Instead, a few non-controversial subjects such as meteorology, sports and agricultural research etc were chosen for cooperation. The logic which motivated us was simple. It was our belief at the time that unless the process of cooperation begins, the spirit of cooperation will not grow. Once the countries begin to meet as a group to deal with some issues of common concern, this will gradually build up confidence and eventually we will be able to move to more substantive subjects.

Subsequent events have unfortunately proved that the strategy adopted at Colombo in 1981 has not worked. Despite numerous meetings at the level of Ministers, senior officials and technical officials the achievements are really very few and perhaps not worth the effort made by the governments. In fact, the only success that one can talk about SAARC is that it is there; it is still able to hold summits from time to time. However, the summits have become protocol events full of 'sound and fury signifying nothing'. The leaders make eloquent and statesmanlike speeches but do they really mean what they say? There is no concrete evidence. There is a deep mist of distrust clouding the vision of the leaders. The last two summits were preceded by situations which left no doubt that the member countries do not accord a high priority to SAARC. They all pay lip service to it but the commitment is just not there. Over ten years of meetings seminars and the six summits have not had the expected result either in terms

of building up the level of mutual trust and confidence or in launching significant programmes. This time Bangladesh is talking about poverty alleviation, trade preferences etc to give some muscle to the SAARC Programme. But there were similar rhetoric in the past with no worthwhile outcome. One wonders why has these years of work been so sterile? An answer, if not the only answer, in my view, can be found in the Babri mosque episode. The rise of fundamentalism and fanaticism has been steadily fuelling discord, distrust and hatred in the region. Religion-based political parties in the region have prevented the people of the region from coming closer. In the process they also stood in the way of greater understanding and trust among the different communities. These fundamentalist parties have preached hatred and hostility towards other people. They have aroused the peace-loving common people of the region to hurt each other and often, to kill each other. They thrive on a spirit of revenge and retaliation. They oppose the modernization of the society. They have been fighting against the secularization of politics because that would have ended their chance of capturing political power. It may be recalled that in the sub-continent it was the leaders of India who embraced the policy of secularism and enshrined it in India's constitution. Bangladesh, emerging as an independent country in 1971, accepted secularism as a basic pillar of state policy. Unfortunately, however, one can see that the forces of communalism have eroded the spirit of secularism in both India and Bangladesh and the last few years have seen the rapid rise of the fundamentalists. In India today a fundamentalist party is the main opposition in the Parliament. Until recently several important state governments were in

their control. In Bangladesh the weakening of the secularist spirit began with the political change in the country in 1975. The process still goes on. Today the government works hand in hand with a fundamentalist party which worked actively against the independence struggle of Bangladesh. Pakistan's leadership never believed in secularism but Gen Ziaul Huq pushed the country further away from the spirit of the modern times. Extremists and fanatics are not sitting idle in other countries of the region. In my view, it is this phenomenon which must be addressed by the leaders of the SAARC countries if they mean what they say in terms of forging regional cooperation. The forces of reaction and hatred must be curbed. Communal politics-based on the religious sentiments of the people cannot be permitted to thrive on hatred against other communities. The simple truth is that one cannot promote cooperation across national frontiers when a wall of distrust and hatred is being erected by the fanatics.

SAARC has reached a stage when the members must take stock of the situation. They have to seek the root cause of the malaise. They must realize that the best plan for cooperation will fail if there is no mutual trust. In the environment of rising fundamentalism which preach communal hatred we cannot hope to have a genuine meeting of the minds and a spirit of accommodation. The next summit in January must not skirt the basic issue. It will be unrealistic and naive on the part of the leaders to put the Babri mosque episode under the rug. They must take this as a signal that mutual trust which is an indispensable condition for cooperation is missing in South Asia. Indeed the leaders will pass the test of statesmanship if they can bring back goodwill and trust among the nations and communities. Only then can we look up to SAARC to fulfill its promise.

Algeria Gets Tough with its Fundamentalists

Chris Simpson writes from Algiers

Islamic militants killed five police officers in Algeria. The authorities clamped a nighttime curfew on the capital Algiers and gave an ultimatum to the militants to disarm. The militants have gone underground to continue the fight to build an Islamic state in Algeria started by the now outlawed Islamic Salvation Front. Gemini News Service reports on what has led to the latest political crisis in Algeria.



ABBASI MADANI
Two year prison sentence

with a PhD from Britain imprisoned by the French during the Algerian war of independence. Madani developed a massive following. His performances at mosques drew hundreds. FIS grew in popularity as it successfully exploited the growing hostility in Algeria toward the National Liberation Front (FLN), which had held power since independence.

The fierce blend of militant Islamic teachings and virulent attacks on the regime, combined with the promise of a better Algeria, held obvious attractions for the thousands of young unemployed, who became its main supporters. More than 75 per cent of Algerians are under 30. The FLN role in the war against French colonial rule meant little to them. FIS took on the mantle of the old, revolutionary FLN. FIS looked unstoppable. It won strongly in municipal elections in June 1990 and looked set to repeat the victory in legislative elections in late-1991. It would have been the first time a radical Islamic movement had taken power through the ballot box, with repercussions throughout the Muslim world. FIS was to be denied its finest hour. The military stepped in, the elections were cancelled and a new High Council of State (HCE) was formed as President Benjedid stepped down after

13 years. The new regime banned FIS. Some 8,000 of its supporters were sent to special detention centres without any trial, while 12-year prison sentences were given to Madani and his leading lieutenant, Ali Bel Hadj. Those mosques which FIS had come to dominate were closed. The HCE, first under President Mohamed Boudiaf, who was assassinated in June, and then under President Ali Kafi, has made it clear it wants to return Algeria to some kind of democracy, to revive the process aborted in January 1992. With this objective in mind, a tentative dialogue has been started with the main political parties, including the moderate Islamic movements. FIS, however, remains banned. The HCE has made it clear there is no place at the negotiating table for Islamic radicals who do not accept the new ground rules: they must modify

their views or face continued isolation. If they resist and continue the armed struggle, the HCE is committed to defeating the fundamentalists through force of arms. But the outright victory the regime wants, and has pinned such hope on, has yet proved elusive. While comparatively few former FIS activists have taken up weapons, the underground movements have posed a permanent security threat. The violence has mostly been fairly small-scale, but worryingly persistent. Scarcely a day goes by without some kind of incident being reported in the Algerian press: a shooting at a road-block, a late-night gun-battle, a bank raid, a bombing. The papers are full of updates on the security forces' pursuit of wanted terrorist leaders and endless speculation as to who is behind the violence. There have been repeated allegations that Iran, Sudan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are involved. France,

too, has been attacked for allegedly harbouring known FIS sympathisers. The bombs have mostly been directed at telephone booths or empty buildings, but civilians have also come under attack. President Ali Kafi has warned that Algeria is "faced with a situation fraught with violence and terrorism" and has urged that "society must support the state and defend itself against the forces of sabotage and death." He has also hinted at outside powers having an interest in promoting violence in Algeria echoing the line taken by the Algerian press. The government has set up an anti-terrorism unit at the Ministry of Defence, headed by General Mohammed Lamari, a man with a tough reputation. It has also set up special courts to deal with those suspected of being members of underground Islamic movements or found with arms. General Lamari's men have already sprung into action with a series of high profile raids on known fundamentalist strongholds, seizing large supplies of weaponry and making mass arrests. It has been made clear that those who choose to ignore President Kafi's amnesty will face long prison sentences or even death. CHRIS SIMPSON is a freelance journalist and broadcaster, specialising in West African politics. He recently visited Algiers.

To the Editor...

'Dhaka WASA billing'
Sir, In reply to a letter published in The Daily Star on November 30, 1992 titled 'Dhaka WASA billing' written by M K Nabi of 86 Swaminibagh Lane, we, the concerned authority, like to state that long before the publication of this letter Mr Nabi was well explained about his 'Asahi' water meter on July 8, 1992 by our Executive Engineer from the Meter Department on his application on April 7, 1992. After that he applied on August 26, 1992 to pay his pending WASA bills in twelve instalments. With a view to recovering the arrears dues, ten instalments were allowed in his favour and accordingly bill was sent to him. But instead of paying the bill, he again raised complaint about meter readings system on October 10, 1992. So it becomes clear that he did not apply with the intent of paying his pending bills, rather he adopted this tactic to avoid disconnection of line. It has also been apparent by record of this Authority that Mr Nabi has long been avoiding to pay his WASA bills with the excuse of meter reading system. It may be mentioned that till 1.9.92, the WASA arrears, including govt excise duties, with lien stands at Taka 56,954.55. In the mean time, on October 24, 1992, he was requested by the Revenue Zone-1 to pay his arrears.

Otherwise, the letter also told, his water line would be disconnected and certificate case would be filed to realise the arrears. Dhaka WASA hopes that Mr Nabi would refrain from further wasting time and relieve himself of the debt by paying the total arrears in time and thereby save his water line from being disconnected. Syed Altaf Hossain Public Information Officer Dhaka WASA

Save the youth
Sir, Now-a-days, there's found a mixed feeling, with hopes and aspirations of success, among the present youths. We consider the dark alleys we see as their destructiveness to the highest magnitude. The reason behind it is the increasing evils like addiction to drugs, terrorism, hijack, and murder as well as yet existence communication gap between opposite sexes. On the other hand there are ways to overcome these evils overriding the youths. If we consider the practical side we find that the political and patriotic social workers can contribute greatly to the character boosting of the present day youths. If they can be kept away from political arena and encouraged to study sincerely then the present youth will be able to locate the real good of life. Therefore, it should be the joint responsibility of the present political leaders, social workers, parents and the teachers in the educational institutions to groom the young boys and girls to face the future challenge of survival in a world of ever increasing population. The young generation should be taught the ways and means of facing the challenges of life, which will be more difficult in future than are today. F M Mehedi Hasan Pallabi, Mirpur, Dhaka

Beauty parlours
Sir, Beauty parlours have once again become an issue of newspaper reports and editorial reviews. What is very much alarming and unfortunate is that some or many such shops in the country are functioning virtually as massage parlours and allegedly promoting immoral activities in the society. The police in the recent days have however succeeded in arresting quite a large number of persons engaged in the massage parlour services. There are of course some genuine beauty parlours exclusively for ladies. But the activities of the fictitious beauty parlours have created a humiliating situation for those who are running genuine business. We would urge upon the concerned authority to take appropriate actions in order to protect the good-will and reputation of the genuine beauty parlours. M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka

Practical planning
Sir, Several economists played a significant role during preliberation days in respect of finding out disparities existed in the then two wings of Pakistan in respect of industries, services, infrastructures etc. These economists became Planning Commission members, advisors to policy planners and so on. Thus large industries like Machine Tools Factory, Dry Dock, paper mills, diesel plants etc were set up in the country. Now the Machine Tools Factory could not pay wages, salaries etc. to employees during the past four months. The sale volume was hardly 6.00 crore Taka against 7.50 crore taka salary, wages etc in 91-92 while the loss was Tk 18.00 crore in 91-92 against Tk 15.00 crore in 90-91. Chittagong Steel Mills lost Tk 55.00 crore in 91-92 against Tk 51.00 crore loss in 90-91. The total sale volume of Tk 51.00 crore in 91-92 is less than salary, wages etc. and interest payable against bank borrowings. The learned economists planners conceived larger and

larger projects but they had no practical experience in respect of management. Under the above backdrop, who is really accountable the plant manager or the planner? And what further plan can actually save the economy? Sadiq Alee Moghbazar Dhaka

Rules of syntax
Sir, With reference to the article, titled 'Nations must adopt means to ensure lasting peace' published on Dec. 3, in your esteemed daily, I would refer to the following excerpts with a view to knowing whether they conform to the rules of syntax and established usages: "Cooperation among the states is the spirit of the time in the 'unipolar world' at large after the fall of communism"; "Ziaur Rahman gave an institutional shape to that spirit on a regional basis, to be emulated in other regions of the world, which is now at the threshold of 21st century"; "..... cooperation becomes near impossible"; "Let alone the internal disturbance..... regional cooperation"; "I wish it comes true"; "... they have illegally went there for settlement." Would the learned readers enlighten us, please? Golam Nabi Nasrabad, Chittagong.