

Mahathir's Visit to Dhaka Raises Possibilities and Focuses on Old Challenges

KUALA LUMPUR — Any number of experts here would agree that the visit of Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Bangladesh has given a boost to Dhaka-KL relations...

An astute politician, Mahathir acts his priorities right, on long-term and short-term perspectives, in domestic and foreign fields, and goes about tackling them in the way he thinks best...

Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Badawi has spoken well of the CEPZ, partly because products produced here could move into the export market without facing too many quota restrictions...

International Airport on his first arrival in Bangladesh was just too cumbersome for his understanding, the situation made further complicated by a request for a "commission" for customs clearance...

Export Constraints

Implementation of a policy in its totality may not be possible all the time for obvious reasons. But implementation of certain specific suggestions should be made mandatory if those do not contradict the policy itself...

As things stand today, the drive cannot succeed unless the whole system has been geared up to match the challenges of the option. Sure enough, the private sector needs to be given the impetus for the purpose...

Clearly, some of these demands may have been extended far enough for creating unfavourable influence on the country's existing facilities, but once the authority has conceded to the demands there is no points backing out...

A National Committee on Export with the country's Prime Minister as head on top of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) is soon coming up. Whether this will bring the necessary impetus to the area is a matter of mere conjecture...

Sure enough the government side has many things to do. It can obviously direct its embassies and high commissions to open trade cells responsible for monitoring demands for Bangladeshi products abroad...

Like several disadvantages they also enjoy a few deciding advantages in this regard—cheap labour and raw materials for some unconventional items figure prominently...

Shame on Us All

The most sacred of our national monuments has fallen prey to vandalism. Our revered Shaheed Minar stood desecrated on the very eve of Shaheed Day. Never before, not even during the dark Pakistani days...

We are outraged. Our heads hang in shame, and our hearts burst in anger. There will obviously be many claims, and many more theories as to who did it and why. In our view the real culprit is the atmosphere of political violence that now exists...

The story in circulation is that an altercation between two groups—one working on the last minute decoration for Shaheed Day, and another wanting a right of passage through the blocked roads—resulted in the latter going on a rampage...

Without jumping into any conclusion, we feel persuaded to suggest that there is much more to it than meets the eye. We urge the government, no demand of it, to use all the intelligence bodies within its fold to get to the bottom of this event...

There are events, memories and monuments in a nation's life that are deemed so sacred that they are held beyond every controversy and above all politics. Shaheed Minar and events and memories of Shaheed Day are such events for us...

Just as the stage was set for the Prime Minister's trip to South Asia, Dr Mahathir played host to Prime Minister Aneurwood Jugnauth of Mauritius, discussing a number of projects which Malaysia could set up in the Indian Ocean island...

With all its basic indicators, like GNP, GDP growth and exports, in excellent form, but considerably behind those of the Newly Industrialised Countries (NICs), like South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, Malaysia must indeed embark on an economic expansion...

One awkward fact that cast a shadow over the Prime Minister's visit to Dhaka and Islamabad was that, although prepared long in advance, it came just two months after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya...

INDIA'S oldest underground communist movement has emerged. Twenty-five years after the movement was launched in 1967 from the village of Naxalbari, Bihar state, the Naxalites have decided to enter the political mainstream...

Last December 28, Vinod Mishra, who leads the ultra-leftist Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), emerged from the underground to address a massive political rally of more than 100,000 activists...

Mr Mishra did a historic gesture. He publicly admitted the excesses and mistakes in party politics and promised to make amends. He suggested that underground armies and the annihilation of class enemies had proved useless...

Still, West Bengal and Bihar states remain the hot seats of the Naxalite movement. And fighting continues in the south, in Andhra Pradesh state where Naxalite extremists have killed scores of policemen and politicians...

land and jungle. But, says one political observer, The Naxalite movement has finally realised that violence doesn't pay. It breeds contempt for those who practise it. And sometimes, as in Malaysia, the communist movement itself can die following continued violence and underground struggle...

Observers say that for the mainstream Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)—also known as CPI-ML—it is clear as daylight that electoral politics has come. "People have come to trust the parliamentary system," says Ashim Chatterji, one of the Naxalite theoreticians...

He himself lost an election to the West Bengal Assembly in 1990 but is unfazed. "The people brought to power and ousted the likes of Indira Gandhi," he says. The electoral process has emerged as a weapon and it would be wrong to boycott polls now, he says...

Already, the Naxalites have tasted some electoral success. frequent response to the Mounties has been along these lines: "We understand what you are saying. We want to change, but you have to understand we have long been working in a difficult environment. You can help us..."

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Public Rally

Sir, If the number of people who attend public rally is the indicator of our political development, then we have reached the height, for, our political rallies are often projected with attributives like 'mammoth', 'historic', 'unprecedented' etc. Of course, size in terms of space occupied does not matter since we have the most famished look and sickly constitution on account of penury...

AT HOME AND ABROAD

S. M. ALI

regional plane, Mahathir's offer to provide a link between the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is of immense significance.

At this moment, these are only promises and possibilities. Much—indeed so much—remains to be done, more by Bangladesh than by Malaysia, to translate them into realities.

Judging by my talks with unofficial experts, some trade representatives and even sources close to our High Commission, the overall perception of Bangladesh among a cross section of Malaysians still remains hazy, if not unfavourable. For instance, there is really nothing unique about Bangladesh setting aside an export processing zone. Other countries in Asia, especially Vietnam, China and the Philippines, have done the same. However,

ments, such as the by-election in Mirpur which contributed to the postponement of Begum Khaleda Zia's official visit to France, continue to cause dismay in Malaysia.

During such a discussion, the message from my long-time friends in Malaysia is always loud and clear. It is simply this, "We can do without a long tax holiday, but we cannot do without an stable economic climate, an uninterrupted flow of output, a satisfactory level of productivity of labour and more streamlined official procedures..."

According to one potential investor from Malaysia, who spoke on the basis of anonymity, the treatment he received at the Dhaka

of the communist movement, which remains fragmented," says a former Naxalite. There are various players. For instance, the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) in Bihar, which has been active in the underground, is at odds with the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) leaders in Patna. The MCC has been alleged to wage anti-upper caste violence. But the MCC is inspired by guerrilla warfare and guns are easily available in Bihar. This is one maverick group which the Naxalite movement has to contend with.

There are signs that those who are pleading for the gun and others who have opted for the ballot box may have a final battle of their own.

One of the champions of the armed struggle, Maszud Haq, is a veteran who was involved in the Naxalite movement in West Bengal in 1969. He still believes in class war. From his one-room apartment in a narrow street of a heavily populated Calcutta sub-

urb, he says: "You have a revolution and no one dies. That is impossible." Mr Haq was crippled by police torture after a couple of decades in jail.

It is interesting to note that Mr Siddharth Shanker Ray, newly-appointed Indian Ambassador to Washington, was the man who almost destroyed the Naxalite movement when he was the Chief Minister in West Bengal.

The police were so organised that many Naxalite leaders were killed in encounters. Dead were hundreds of young intellectuals who deserted their homes, studies and bright careers to participate in an armed struggle to "liberate" India.

The young men and women came from all over India. But Mr Ray and his men fought the Naxalite movement using every means. For, Calcutta then was a deserted city. Factories were deserted, struck by armed Naxalites. Capital was fleeing from one of the biggest industrial centres of the country.

It was only when the Naxalite movement was contained that Calcutta became a vibrant city again. As governor, Mr Ray tried some of his tactics in Punjab State, torn by gun-toting Sikh separatists, but failed.

—Depthnews Asia

India's Naxalites: Rebels Emerge from Bihar's Underground

Prakash Chandra writes from New Delhi

The signs are that those who are pleading for the gun and others who have opted for the ballot box may have a final battle of their own

In the last general election, its electoral front—the Indian People's Front based in south and central Bihar—elected an MP to the Lower House of Parliament in New Delhi.

The CPI-ML has also managed to win five seats in the Bihar Assembly. Earlier, Santosh Rana, a veteran of the CPI-ML's provisional Central Committee, won a seat in the Assembly while still in jail.

Analysts say the demolition of the mosque at Ayodhya and the victory march of Hindu fundamentalists signal the early end of India's communist movement. Thus, some desperate remedies were required.

The aim now is to enter electoral politics and promote more unity among leftist groups to fight the conservative right. According to some analysts, the Naxalites may

The Network for Peace

Mountie Officers Go to the Rescue in South Africa

by Derek Ingram

The Commonwealth observers of the violence in South Africa are a mix of policemen, soldiers, lawyers, and diplomats. They have attended meetings, marches, demonstrations and funerals in a bid to reduce tension. And they have mediated in quarrels between crowds and the police. Gemini News Service describes the so far unreported work of the Commonwealth peace mission.

ally ugly. Another day, Jensen and Chief Superintendent Peter Stevens, of Britain, were attending a political rally at Ketelephone when a man was found to have drugs and arrested. The two intervened with the police and again helped to placate the crowd.

The Mounties have had frank exchanges with the South African police about their behaviour and usually get a good response. They have helped to relay to the authorities police complaints about bad pay and they have discussed with South African police chiefs ways in which they can train their men and women in community relations.

The exchanges with the police have been revealing. The

notched up a considerable success in the area worst hit by political violence in the whole of South Africa—Umbumbulu, Natal. In one settlement in the area called Mpuahini, 22 people were massacred on October 24.

For a long time attempts to bring together the warring factions from the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the African National Congress (ANC) failed. Then Moses Anafu, a Ghanaian diplomat on the staff of the Commonwealth Secretariat working with the observer group, started days of shuttle diplomacy.

Finally, he got together a meeting in the local magistrates court, chaired by the magistrate and attended by representatives of the IFP, ANC, the regional authority,

the Regional Dispute Resolution Committee, business, churches, South African police and the KwaZulu homeland police.

The result was the formation for the first time of a joint committee—an interim local dispute resolution committee. Anafu said he was "overjoyed," adding: "The prospects for peace are excellent. The participants are very committed."

It is this type of local activity, carried out with the ordinary people that the Commonwealth group has proved can be of enormous value if it could be repeated around the country. The group has been working with two other teams of observers from the UN and the European Community, but it has evolved its own style of operation along guidelines laid

down by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku. While the UN team comprises bureaucrats from its staff in New York and the EC team is of 15 police, the Commonwealth team is much more varied in its composition. Its members include the Director of the Australian Institute of Criminology, a retired Nigerian general, a former Supreme Court judge from Ghana and the Assistant Commissioner of Police of New Zealand.

Its brief is to help the agencies and mechanisms set up under the Peace Accord to prevent and combat violence; liaise with the authorities, police and magistrates; strengthen confidence between the law enforcement agencies and communities; ease communications between groups concerned with violence; and give all concerned the benefit of their experience and insights.

At the outset the group met de Klerk socially and all the political parties, except the Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB), then went on to talk with business, trade union and church leaders.

litical/union activities and thereby provide shelter and other assistance to protect him against law. Taking advantage of this trend, some people in the society as well as in the authority are becoming more and more corrupted. It would be evident that the present trend of political activities is rather encouraging people to violate the law of the land and social order and discipline e.g. hartal, protest processions etc.

No matter what may be the action, ethical or unethical, legal or illegal, we have to achieve our ends, establish us in authority and also get wealthy—this is the motto of the powerful and the would-be-powerful in our society!

The attitude must change.

M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka.

Mahbulul Haque Chowdhury Sonali Bank, HO, Dhaka.

Soft drinks

Sir, Now-a-days, soft drinks are available in every nook and corner of the country. Sometimes, the bottle of drinks remain unsold at the retailer shops for months, even years together. We are not aware of the validity of these drinks, as no expiry date is written on the body of the bottle. The drink certainly cannot remain pure inside the bottle for an unlimited time. It is likely to get contaminated as well as develop fungus due to long storage. Such drinks may cause health hazard when taken.

I would, therefore, request the concerned authority to give clear instructions publicly about the drinks.

Attitude

Sir, One serious obstruction in the way of smooth enforcement of law is that a person who commits a crime in most cases is not treated as a criminal as his political or other platforms move out to colour his criminal act as a part of po-

Golam Nabi Nasrabad, Chittagong.