

The Sino-Indian Accord

The accord between India and China reached in Beijing on Tuesday should be welcomed by all for a number of reasons. In the first place, it marks a major step forward taken by two giants to adjust to the mood, indeed to the new climate, in the post cold-war era, both dealing with the only remaining superpower in the world, the United States, in a new frame of references and with caution and some distrust. On issues which touch on regional and international affairs, much remains to be done after a good start, much that will put the Sino-Indian relations on durable, enduring basis.

The immediate gains on the visit of Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao to Beijing are of course of bilateral nature. The most important of the four agreements signed in the Chinese capital relates to the complex border issue on which the two countries fought a short but a fairly bloody war in 1962, both sides differing over the demarcation of the frontier between the two nations in the Himalayas.

Under the new accord which follows not-unexpected pragmatic line, both countries agree to respect and observe the "line of actual control" that separates the troops of the two countries and promise not to resort to force or to threats of force. The need for further talks on the details of the agreement is there. However, neither side has shown any urgency for these talks. So, unless these talks take place, the 30-year Sino-Indian border dispute remains frozen. So does such controversial issues as Tibet and Kashmir on which there were no public declaration during the visit of Rao to China.

Other agreements, on trade, exchanges in the cultural field and cooperation in the protection of environment should bring the two countries together. With the two countries following deregulations in their economies, their present total annual trade of \$ 350 million should show a dramatic increase, perhaps sooner than most people expect.

Bangladesh which is a close friend of both India and China will, like other South Asian countries, watch further developments in Beijing-New Delhi relations with keen interest. Here, we have other and broader expectations. We believe, with the easing of tension and the freezing of the border dispute with China, India should explore the possibility of slowing down its defence build-up which has now reached an alarming proportion. However, we sincerely hope that any such move taken by New Delhi will be matched by Islamabad. This will be a major gain for South Asia from the Sino-Indian agreement reached in Beijing.

Of Roof Passengers

The government has on Tuesday asked the owners and workers of 'trucks and buses' not to carry 'unauthorised passengers on roofs and goods beyond the stipulated twenty mounds including passengers' luggage'. Infringement of this order will be met with 'stringent legal action'.

The phrasing, as published in The Daily Star, is most pitifully garbled but what it wanted to mean is a most timely and much needed action. No passengers on bus roofs anymore and not more than 20 mounds — what happened to the metric system? — of goods on the self-same roofs, very easy to guess why. Any bus carrying 1500 kg or 30 passengers on roof with another 1000 kg of goods is sure to topple through sheer imbalance. If the authorities can enforce their instruction, the risk of accidents could be radically reduced. The problem is here one of enforcement, as clearly shown by harking back to the 'stipulated 20 mounds'. In fact, there are existing instructions against buses taking passengers on roofs too. The bus operators have honored those by flouting them very consistently. The present order is a reiteration of the instructions coupled with warning of stringent legal action — something which may or may not lead to punishment. What would this whole exercise lead to?

Why hasn't the government let itself be concerned with the number of the passengers travelling inside the hull of the vehicle? A large-sized bus by Bangladesh standards must not take more than 60 persons — which should mean anything between 3000 and 4000 kg of load, not taking into account the stipulated 380 kg of goods on the roof. In practice any bus of this magnum size carries a load of 5000 kg and upwards. Not to speak of discomfort and degradation heaped on the passengers, how can a bus drag the load of a five-ton-plus truck with any semblance of responsibility? From the first day of their plying, buses lose very fast their compression of engine-power. From the first day of its commissioning, a bus starts travelling towards premature death — for itself and for its passengers. Government must act against overloading of buses by any means.

What is there in the 'order' for the truck people to take heed, what warning is there for them? Who is an 'unauthorised passenger'? No commercially operating truck can take any passenger whatsoever. There can be no 'authorised' passengers for them except the driver's helps and the loaders. But, again in practice, trucks do take on passengers by the dozen. And these passengers run a very great risk of life.

At the very root of all our transport problems is the fact of the quantum of our travelling people and goods for surpassing the seats and space available on buses and trucks. This is at the root of cramming and overloading, speeding and lack of maintenance — and resulting in unending procession of 'accidents'. The whole series of challenges to movement in Bangladesh should be seen from this point — something that the government has worsened by increasing train fare and neglecting local trains. What can be the harm if a truck, when not carrying goods, takes on 50 persons at half the usual fare? Pray, don't heed the fleecing buswallahs and 'order' that only a loaded truck will, under pain of severe punishment, not take a single paying passenger.

When the nation has already made the plunge into a land-communication system from the traditional water-borne one, it must have good roads. Given that the nation must use bigger buses travelling at ensured speeds. A ten times bigger double-decker fleet for Dhaka would be a most welcome thing but not at the speed the present ones ply. Why cannot the double-deckers be made to service a 100 km-radius area around the capital bringing in population centres within a good and humane and less risky daily reach?

THE fourth national council session of the ruling Bangladesh National Party (BNP), held in the city from September 1 to 3, was an impressive show, especially in terms of managing the big gathering of several thousand people.

Attendance of political leaders from several Asian countries added colour to the inaugural session. The relations thus developed could help the government in promoting our national cause, at the regional level.

The most significant point of the whole affair was that the councillors were allowed to discuss everything they thought important for the party during the closed door sessions of the council. The councillors deliberated on issue ranging from the limitations of party leadership to the ways of solving problems of the country's teeming millions.

BNP chief Khaleda Zia not only gave a patient hearing to these field level party activists, she also extended the sessions to a three-day to accommodate the views of all the party units. The BNP chief also did not hesitate to come forward to make a commitment that the councillors' views, delivered in the closed door sessions, would be duly reflected in the party's future policies. The BNP chief also clearly announced the need for replacing the different levels of party leadership with 'fresh, ener-

BNP Puts its House in Order?

by Nurul Kabir

getic and tested ones.'

However, despite all these positive trends in the party, the other side of the coin was also there. Although the councillors spoke on many issues, they seemed to be quite unhappy about the need for ensuring conformity with the party's words and deeds.

The party chief Khaleda Zia, in her pre-election pledges, assured the nation that the BNP, if voted to power, would repeal the undemocratic Special Powers Act, and ensure autonomy to the state run electronic media. Everybody knows that the BNP government has, so far, not taken any step to fulfil these pledges.

Besides, the BNP had passed another controversial law — the Curbing Terrorist Crime Act, 1992 — in parliament by the sheer strength of its majority.

The councillors failed to take to task the party's policy planners for their inconsistency between pledges and practices. The councillors' indifference to this inconsistency was further evident when they remained silent over the party high command's failure to meet the party's constitutional obligations, according to which, the BNP's national council is supposed to meet once a year. The just concluded session was the

fourth, since the party's inception 15 years ago in 1978.

The councillors approved, during the last session, an amendment to the party constitution seeking 'at least one meeting of the national executive committee every three months.' A member of the sub-committee for amendment to the party constitution, while talking over the practicality of the provision, admitted that it

was also there. To begin with, about the formation of the council preparatory committee, allegations are there that Tanbir Ahmed Siddiqi was made convenor of the body without any prior consultation with the party chief. An influential leader of the party told The Daily Star, on condition of anonymity, that Prime Minister Khaleda Zia endorsed the committee only after the

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would be difficult to hold the party's executive body meetings 'at least once every three months.'

When asked why did the councillors propose such an amendment, the BNP leader told this correspondent that a few such 'utopian' proposals were made without adequate understanding between the members of the committee concerned. He also blamed the committee chief for submitting the proposed amendments to the party standing body without seeking final consent of every members of the sub-committee.

Allegations of favouritism

body had been formed by the party General Secretary. She was not very happy with the original committee and asked the Secretary General to co-opt some leaders including Works Minister Barrister Rafiqul Islam Miah and Post and Telecommunications Minister Tarique Islam.

Earlier, the works minister developed an open dispute with Tanbir when the latter proposed, on the occasion of the formation of a party fund, named after BNP's founder Chairman late president Ziaur Rahman, that only those able to contribute money for the fund would be allowed to speak

identical allegations of favouritism came up during and following the closed door sessions of the council. A top ranking BNP leader informed The Daily Star that a large number of representatives from many districts and thana level units of the party were deprived of the chance to address the councillors, while there are examples that more than four representatives of a single unit had been deliberately given the opportunity to speak on the occasion.

The council session was over on September 3 without resolving a crucial issue — selection of the new set of lead-

ership for the party.

The councillors, under the provisions of the amended party constitution, elected Khaleda Zia as the party chief for the next two years and left the matter of selecting rest of the leadership with her. She is supposed to announce the names phase by phase.

As a result, different lobbies in the party are now busy making direct and indirect efforts to secure blessings of the party chief for their respective candidates.

Meanwhile, Khaleda Zia had an informal sitting with four of senior party leaders on September 2 and discussed, among other issues, that of the possible Secretary General of the party, one of the joint secretaries general told The Daily Star. According to sources, Khaleda Zia mentioned two names for the post who had been actively serving politics of the country since their student days.

However, sources close to the party chief informed The Daily Star that Khaleda Zia, while appointing the Secretary General of the party, would consider the aspirants' political career, efficiency in running a ministry, capability in handling organisational matters and most of all, performance in parliament.

Whatever the case may be, the tensions of the aspirants for different party offices will most likely be over by the end of the current month.

Pilgrimage to Shaoshan, Mao's birthplace and hometown in Hunan province, in south China, has also picked up in recent years. In 1992, Mao's old residence received 1.2 million visitors compared with 230,000 in 1980.

Mr Yuan, the historian, says despite the serious mistakes Mao committed in later years, he lives in the Chinese people's memory as a national hero and a great leader. It was under his leadership that our nation shook off the humiliations of imperialist aggression and oppression for more than 100 years and gained independence.

'No matter how times change, his merits and moral integrity will always shine.'

Wang Yiqiu of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences sees rational elements even in what is considered to be Mao's mistaken theory. 'For one thing, he was correct to point out the existence of class struggle in the socialist period. He was only mistaken in his estimate of its scope and in measures he took to deal with it.' At 34, Ms Wang is among the youngest researchers in the field. She is planning to delve into details about Mao's work and thinking in his prime in the 1940s and early 1950s.

'Some tragic seeds were sown in this period, and I wish to dig them out,' she says. 'For several decades China's millions shared with Mao pleasures and angers, sorrows and joys. And he was so successful in reshaping Chinese values. Isn't that amazing?' — Depthnews Asia

The government argues that its proposal is not a political solution but a judicial one, and that the courts are the ones who will settle all questions of rights violations during military rule.

The government, despite its unfulfilled elections promises still commands popular support, however, and the vast majority of Chileans, weary of the dictatorship and its criminal record, do not want to return to the past.

Human rights activists who demonstrated against the bill have been repressed by the police while murderers, rapists and torturers walk freely through Chile's streets.

The government has made huge efforts to convince Chileans that 'we are a country on the verge of development, the tigers' of Latin America.' Jorge Correa, executive secretary of the now extinct commission, has said that 'rather than worry, about whether we are tigers or jaguars, we should never forget that we have also been monsters...' The government bill clearly forgets who the real monsters are. — GEMINI NEWS

LUIS TRICOT is a Chilean freelance journalist who regularly writes and broadcasts on Latin American affairs.

China Ponders Mao's Legacy

Xiong Lei writes from Beijing

China's celebration of Mao's centenary in December will have none of the cult fervour of the Cultural Revolution

thologies on Mao came out in China between 1979 and 1991. Dozens of institutes were set up to specialise in Mao study and a variety of academic journals launched.

Studies cover almost every aspect, Mr Wang says. They range from Mao's thoughts on politics, philosophy, economics, military strategy, international strategy, literature and art to his leadership style, command of language and calligraphy.

Researchers have dealt with many unexplored areas such as Mao's thinking as a youth. Mr Shi says. For instance, reviews and analyses on influences of various schools of Chinese and Western cultures on Mao in his early years have enriched our recognition of the formation of his character and mentality, pointing to the important role of China's fine cultural tradition in nurturing Mao Zedong Thought.

This has revised the traditional concept that Marxism was the sole theoretical origin of Mao Zedong Thought.

Another breakthrough is the conclusion that Mao Zedong Thought is a crystallisation of collective wisdom. 'Surveys on other Communist leaders' theo-

retical exploration in the Chinese revolution in relation with Mao's pursuit have convinced us that Mao Zedong Thought was not one person's creation,' Mr Shi says. 'With multiple resources, Mao Zedong Thought is an open-ended scientific, ideological and theoretical system.'

Progress has also been made in studies on Mao's search for the way to build socialism in China, the most controversial subject in Mao study, he says. Some very valuable ideas were wrapped in, or interwoven with, Mao's erroneous theories and practices. We have to analyse and distinguish his brilliant ideas from his errors very carefully.

For those devoted to the study of one of history's most complex figures, Mao's centenary marks a year of bumper harvest.'

Scholars are presenting the results of years of research, says Mr Wang Yuyao of the Mao Zedong Study Group. 'More than 100 new works on Mao are expected to come out this year.'

Notable among the new publications are 'Chronicle of Mao Zedong's Life Up to 1949', 'A Collection of Mao Zedong's

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government's proposed bill to speed up the processing of human rights abuse cases during the Pinochet regime has received angry criticism from human rights activists. They say the bill will legalize impunity for those responsible for violations of human rights. The activists argue that the motivation behind the bill is pressure from the army.

Chile still Hiding its Monsters in Military

Luis Tricot writes from Santiago

The Chilean government's proposed bill to speed up the processing of human rights abuse cases during the Pinochet regime has received angry criticism from human rights activists. They say the bill will legalize impunity for those responsible for violations of human rights. The activists argue that the motivation behind the bill is pressure from the army.

ernment and the population at large. Their demand was simple: put an end to all trials involving violation of human rights and apply, without further ado, the amnesty law decreed by the Pinochet dictatorship in 1978.

What followed was nothing but another expression of the peculiar nature of Chile's transition from military to civilian rule. The democratically elected government negotiated with the military, thus giving legitimacy to the army's claims.

In a 15-minute televised speech to the nation, Aylwin explained that as a statesman, 'I have a duty of combining the virtue of justice with the virtue of prudence.' However, rather than showing true statesmanship, the president's euphemism seems to recognise the might of the armed forces and the weakness of his government.

Sola Sierra, chairwoman of the Association of Relatives of the Disappeared, has said that 'any proposal that does not contribute to the application of justice and to the identification of the culprits, is nothing but a concealed impunity.'

The government has opted for a judicial rather than a political solution to the problem. It insists that the ordinary courts will, eventually, settle all questions concerning violation of human rights that took place under military rule. But critics point to the sad record of the judiciary regarding the protection of human rights and the Supreme Court's unconditional support of the dictatorship.

They argue that the so-called 'Aylwin Doctrine' — truth and justice as far as it is possible — would lead to impunity for those responsible for crimes against ordinary Chileans.

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The new bill proposes to speed up trials involving the military by appointing ad-hoc judges from the Appeal Courts to deal with, on a full-time basis, around 200 cases.

Abolishing the 1978 amnesty law was included in the present government's political platform for the 1989 general elections. But now, President Aylwin unambiguously recognises the validity of the amnesty currently in force.

Soon after taking office, Aylwin announced creation of a special eight-member commission to investigate human rights abuses during the military rule.

The report of the National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, headed by a respected lawyer and former Senator Raul Rettig, was presented to the President in 1991. The commission stopped short of naming names.

The new bill proposes to speed up trials involving the military by appointing ad-hoc judges from the Appeal Courts to deal with, on a full-time basis, around 200 cases.

The government proposes also to guarantee the secrecy of the trials by ensuring that the identity of those giving testimony, either as witness or direct participants in criminal acts, is not to be revealed.

Officers will also have the right to give evidence in places other than the ordinary courts, namely, military barracks.

Human rights lawyers claim that this bill 'demolishes the principle of equality before the law.' There is a widespread feeling amongst the population that the military were and continue to be a privileged cast, above the law and the constitution.

They also point out that no members of the armed forces can be held responsible for any of the thousands of killings and kidnappings committed between 1973 and 1978 because the period is covered by amnesty.

The government's proposal clearly forgets who the real monsters are. — GEMINI NEWS

iv) Each allottee of any government approved housing estate may be given a house building loan not exceeding 10 lakh Taka for construction of a single-storied building. The amount of the loan together with interest would have to be refunded by the allottee/owner of the land within a maximum period of twenty-five years following which the land and the entire building, no matter if the owner has constructed a building of more than one storied from his own source, would be forfeited by the loan giving bank.

v) Government may frame necessary rules and regulations with time factor, for purchase, sale, payment, registration, mutation, cancellation of allotment transfer, passing out site plan, grant of HBFC loan etc.

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To the Editor...

Whither compensation money?

Sir, I would like to draw the attention of the present democratic government to a long-pending matter relating to the non-payment of compensation to the owners of land acquired by the government under Dhaka Collectorate LA Case No. 2 of