

Pak-Bangla Ties

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's two-day official visit to Pakistan seems to have brought into focus some of the less explored or even unexplored areas with tremendous potential for bilateral co-operation.

The two countries needed to take a look at the baggage of history strictly within the purview of bilateral relations for a re-invigoration of their ties. However the joint communique is conspicuous by its silence over two of the most outstanding issues admittedly vexing relations between the two countries.

If this was any criterion for the two countries to come closer, then Begum Zia's visit has amply demonstrated its fulfilment. The fact that the Pakistani Prime Minister has signalled that her government is ready to consider reduction of tariff on the import of jute and jute goods from Bangladesh bodes extremely well because Bangladesh is in a position to meet all of Pakistan's requirement of these two items.

Let the goodwill extend to the entire region for turning it into a most vibrant economic zone.

Narsingdi Hell

Narsingdi is a haunted town now. Panic has overtaken the ordinary conduct of life there as every morning — over a fortnight's time — brings in new cases to people with bludgeoned head, dead or very close to it.

The pattern of the crime is unusual. All the victims were attacked while sleeping out in the open. With the weather sizzling as never before, people prefer to sleep out. And there is again a goodly number of people who do not have a roofed place to rest.

Serial killing of the Jack-the-ripper type is quite unknown in our country. And the attacks speak of a team of killers more like the Brazilian vigilante that have for years been prowling the streets of mega cities like Sao Paulo and killing floating young people by the hundred.

The incredible situation in Narsingdi is a direct threat to all that goes by the name of civilisation. Security, authority, law and order. And is a murderous stab at the functioning of the government. This is not the case of a stray and lonely maniac striking unpredictably at unlikely places.

Is it a case of a few seating in elevated perches in Dhaka taking the hellish situation as one of only local importance deserving to be handled on the thana level? The authorities should know better and it is expected that they would forthwith bring the whole governmental power to bear upon the tiny area of challenge to authority and law and humanity.

Passing of a Stalwart

Mr G M Syed, the colourful Sindh political leader died on Tuesday in Karachi. He was in coma for about a month and died of respiratory problems. He was interned in his own house in 1992 on charge of sedition.

His life spanned almost the whole of this century and he was a senior political leader when India was partitioned in 1947. Although he had come close to Congress leaders Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in the early years of his political career he later on switched over to Muslim League in the forties joining the party in its fight for Pakistan.

Subsequently, he fell out with the Punjabi-dominated Pakistan establishment, and he remained an island of hope and struggle for all who felt the same way. For this honour he had to pay a hefty price — about three decades behind two bars.

A man of courage, probity and erudition was he. With his death a light goes out of the Pakistani political scene — a light of democratic inspiration and cultural self-determination.

He was a good man, steadfast unto death in his love of his land and his people. We mourn his loss.

In this age of electronics and mass communications, the visual barrage of propaganda material plays a distinctive part in the forming of public perceptions. Democracy is thus, in a manner of speaking, a hostage to the media.

Western type democracy is based on the political party system where there is a clear ideological divide. Even today there is a difference between Democrats and Republicans, Conservatives and Labour, Social Democrats and Christian Democrats, Socialists and Republicans, etc. etc. Not so in third world countries, especially those based on more or less, some religious ideology.

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No more Croats and Bosnians

Sir, I read with interest the article on the former Yugoslavia published on April 6 in your paper. I was disappointed, however, by one comment that Mr Arshad-uz-Zaman makes, and I sincerely hope he will reconsider.

Everything that Bosnia is suffering right now, and a shaky cease fire continues to divide Croatia, with Serbs controlling at least 30% of the Croatian republic's territory and no guarantees for the future!

The Great Silent Majority

The trend of the masses has been to revolt against the system and prefer to go outside the political system to search for saviours who promise to take them back to their basic needs and desires.

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These 'saviours' have also tended to mostly appear 'from outside the political system as a reaction to the system in vogue, those within the system having hackneyed answers only, if any, and even then basically found to be universally corrupt and/or inefficient or both.

Perhaps the most spectacular display of a "third force" is in Afghanistan where feudal society, ethnic and sectarian divisions as well as dominant personalities complicated by a decades old civil war had ensured a fractured society seemingly impossible to repair.

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paniment of a client-patron relationship inculcating nepotism, corruption, chicanery, fraud, looting of the public till, graft, etc. in a perverse way for those who would suppress the message of the new message

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

bearers by fair means or foul, the suppression of their message adds to their appeal.

In the Asian sub-continent, major movements influencing the electoral process in contrast to traditional political parties has been seen in India through its democratic history e.g. the untouchables, groaning under the selfish, closed upper sects of the Hindu religion is not a new phenomenon.

With Mujahideen acting as feudal warriors rather than the liberators they professed to be, an adverse reaction was always on the cards. The almost bloodless revolution that has heralded the advent of the genuinely neutral Islamic Taliban has put almost half of Afghanistan's land area to date under its sway in less than two months.

When the country's first Indian-dominated government came to power in 1987 it set off two military coups led by current Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka. Giving Indians political, as well as commercial, domination of Fiji was totally

all available. Cut off from the western money and material that was flowing in during the height of the war, more and more Mujahideen groups turned to drug manufacturing and smuggling to finance their

survival. Internal travel was almost next to impossible in the presence of the "toll tax" (or looting) imposed by these armed groups. In contrast, the advent of the Taliban saw all these disappear like chaff.

There can be no greater manifestation of Afghanistan's problems than the permutations and combinations bedeviling the country because of the illiterate "General" Rashid Dostum, Uzbek warlord of Mazar-i-Sharif, who has created a mercenary force, Jumbish Milli that remained loyal to Soviet Union during the entire course of the war.

The Taliban phenomenon is a welcome third force to the population because in the areas they now control they have disarmed all groups irrespective of their affiliation, opened up all the roads in their control for free travel, imposing peace and tranquility which once seemed to be an impossible dream.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN The Money Game

If you want to know who's running the world — I'll tell you who. It's a money speculator named Reister. Reister, who is popularly known as the Bauer Lac monster, spends his day at the Zurich Bourse buying and selling hard and soft currency.

Migration Scheme Stirs up Racially Divided Fiji

William Gasson writes from Suva

The Chinese would put the last nail in the Fijian political, social and economic coffin

ever, fail to see it that way. It only goes to prove that the whole Chinese scheme is another racket," said a suspicious Mahendra Chaudhry, opposition Labour parliamentary leader, who wanted to know the names of the company's shareholders.

Indians, who first arrived in Fiji 115 years ago as indentured labourers for the sugar industry, make up around 45 per cent of Fiji's 740,000 population. Their domination of Fijian business created ill-feeling among the less commercially inclined indigenous, land-owning Fijians.

When the country's first Indian-dominated government came to power in 1987 it set off two military coups led by current Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka. Giving Indians political, as well as commercial, domination of Fiji was totally

unacceptable to the indigenous population. The coups restored political supremacy to indigenous Fijians and thousands of skilled Indians fled the islands.

Into that recipe for racial resentment the government now wants to add a larger Chinese ingredient, the present Chinese community numbers around 4,700.

"What can the government offer the Chinese in terms of citizenship when it denies equal rights to Indians who have lived in Fiji for 115 years and contributed so much to Fiji's social and economic welfare?" Mr Chaudhry asks.

Comments on the scheme range from realism to reactionary. Bill Yee, president of

the Chinese Association of Fiji, fears that any mass importation of Chinese would have serious social repercussions. "I don't think our infrastructure can sustain a rapid rise like that," he said as he anticipates that the additional population would have a negative impact on hospitals, housing and factories as well as schools and other social services.

He was disappointed that the government had not consulted the local Chinese about the proposal.

A more reactionary response to this "deadly and poisonous suggestion" came from Fijian Nationalist Party (FNP) leader Sakiyasi Butadroka. He worries that, in time, Chinese immigrants would also rule over indigenous Fijians and doom them to be "labourers for the rest of their lives."

"If the sick, illiterate and enslaved Indian indentured labourers could reverse their living conditions to the Fijians in a matter of 50 and more years, the FNP is sure that these Chinese would put the

charisma and rhetoric, they tend to accept at face value whatever is fed to them by the government controlled media or conversely a sophisticated propaganda by the Opposition till they reach the breaking point of toleration. As the phrase implies, they generally tend to remain silent on issues. However, circumstances that test the limits of their patience can rouse them to anger and whenever a catalyst in the form of a personality or an idea comes along that provides them with an alternative to their system, they become vulnerable to that promise, tending to coalesce around the messenger. As history is witness, the "great silent majority" can be a potent force once aroused! One must beware of "the rage of angels."

To the Editor

everything that Bosnia is suffering right now, and a shaky cease fire continues to divide Croatia, with Serbs controlling at least 30% of the Croatian republic's territory and no guarantees for the future! This is hardly having "a relatively easy time as a separate sovereign state."

(including those of the Croats) are sacred. It we limit our concern only to certain humans, then the rights of all humans are in danger. The rights of a person cannot be more important to me simply because of linguistic, religious, ethnic, or ideological considerations — it is a return, in a different form, of the tribalism of a by-gone era.

Popularisation of computer centres

Sir, The BSCIC has taken a practical step with its scheme to provide loans for the open-

ing of more computer print centres (secretariate services) in the country (Star staff report, April 24). This service by the small business persons has become popular in a society where few small offices and homes can afford to possess a personal computer; although bank loans are now available for lease of PCs. (On the other hand the telephone/fax services offered by the small shops have also become popular, but there are some grey areas in the business which have to be rectified).

The computer centres may expand in the second phase (after one to two years) and offer basic training facilities also, to cater to the office staff (computer operators) and for data entry services. An official Code of Practice has to be issued by the government to regulate these new services, and the fees may be standardised initially; later the market forces may take over. The data entry business has a big export

potential (Indian export: one billion dollars per annum). The BCS (Bangladesh Computer Society) may institute an Advisory Board to guide the government policy in this respect, in close coordination with the private industry (approach apex bodies like the FCCI and regional CCIs).

It is also high time that suitable seminars are held at national level to review the PC assembly industry in the country for cheap mass-production. Computer course has been made compulsory in the schools, so thousands of entry level PCs would be required during the next five years. The basic monochrome model without hard disc and windows (both optional) could be produced at a cost below Taka 20,000 (need not go for the latest high speed models). Think PC, or pchipe cholo.

A/Husnain Dhaka

"Nuclear Nexus...."

Sir, Paragraph three of your second post-editorial of 18-4-95, titled "Nuclear Nexus that Thrives on Hypocrisy," written by Daya Kishan Thussu, Associate Editor of Gemini News Service, states:

"The nuclear powers want to ... preserve the privileges that go with a nuclear capability, such as a permanent seat on the UN Security Council."

On the date that Russia, Britain, France and China (i.e. 4 out of a total number of 5) secured a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, in 1945, none of them possessed even a single nuclear weapon.

Therefore, Thussu's assertion is simply misleading. The above-mentioned four obtained their seats because they were the victorious great powers of the Second World War.