

PM's China Visit

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's choice of China as the first country to pay a visit to since her assumption of office is full of significance. At a time when geo-politics is being influenced more and more by economic rather than defence considerations, the Bangladesh premier's China visit seems all set to generate greater economic co-operation between Dhaka and Beijing. The traditional exchange of visits by scholars from both lands since the beginning of civilisation in this part of the world, followed by a wide-ranging co-operation in areas like education, religion, culture and science, has historically proved highly beneficial for both countries. There is no reason why it should be any different in modern times — particularly when the Chinese technology is compatible with our needs, and promises to be better replicated here than in many other parts of the world.

China's emergence as an economic giant in the region as well as in the World — not to forget the expectation of still greater prospects for her — shows that it is a key player not only in the regional but in the global context as well. Chinese success in creating special economic zones is again a highly compelling reason for Bangladesh to seek and strengthen its bilateral economic co-operation with her. Bangladesh is ready to welcome Chinese investment in such economic zones of her own and hopes to benefit from China's experiences in the line. This hope is likely to get a boost through the four agreements and a number of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to be signed during the premier's visit.

If Bangladesh presses for collaborative ventures, it should also look for an access of the Bangladeshi goods into Chinese market on a bigger scale. Our growing trade deficit with China is another compelling reason why export from our side has to be increased manifold. The 1995 understanding reached between the two countries for China to import more commodities from Bangladesh has to be implemented more energetically. The potential for economic co-operation between the two countries is immense. What is needed is to take the initiative for exploring the suitable areas for a fuller realisation of that potential.

Justice for our Heroes

The CID has taken up the case of jail killings of November 3, 1975 and has already started moving. On their prayer warrants of arrest were issued against three former army officers now detained under SPA and two of them were remanded to CID custody for investigation purposes.

No one can say for sure how will this case shape and end. But the first great hurdle — that of reviving it — has at least been engaged and 21 years after the incidence of the crime. And what crime! The indemnity ordinance stood in the way of prosecuting the criminals to be identified after due investigation. At least that was the idea behind the inaction in the matter of mass murder of the Acting President and Prime Minister and other two of the three ministers of the Swadhin Bangla Sarkar or the provisional government formed in exile. It was under this government's leadership and no other agency or persons or groups that we waged the Liberation War and carried it to a victorious triumph and carved a new state on the map of the world. The killing had multiple dimensions to its satanical design and execution. More than mere murder, this was murder in custody. And in state custody — custody of the only sovereign agency in the land. The killing violated the sovereignty and the sanctity of the state. And in killing the supreme leaders of the Liberation War, leaders who won us the war through unparalleled self-sacrifice, superb statesmanship and unsurpassed patriotism, it was the Liberation War and the founding of this state that were being attempted to be killed.

The indemnity abomination is still there. But that could not prevent the present government from initiating the revival of the case and hopefully to dispense it with full justice to the state, the society, the victims and the unfortunate ones that survived the four great heroes of our Liberation War.

Except for Bangabandhu there was no greater hero in our struggle for independence — both armed and constitutional — than Tajuddin Ahmed who led us invincibly in the war to freedom and statehood. We owe it specially to him that the culprits of November 3, 1975 be brought to justice.

National Art Gallery

The demand for a national gallery of art is an old one. On Tuesday a nine-member delegation of painters repeated the same old thing to the State Minister for culture. It is a shame that the governments have not yet had the realisation that this sovereign nation of 120 million souls does not have a national gallery and has to be told of their duty in the matter year after year. All governments, specially after independence, had a culture ministry. Why was it there and what did it do — if it could completely close its eyes to the first-order national need for a national repository of visual and plastic arts?

The same applies to the government's waiting to be told that this nation — to be a nation — needs a national theatre for performing and presentational arts. And needs it here and now. What can these two things cost the government? Possibly in the lowest ranges of money in nine-digit figures. It's, by state standards, not quite reckonable money. So what is holding the present government to do the job without anyone's asking or prodding?

Mayor Hanif, not long ago, set a model for responsiveness to the city-dwellers' need for culture — by promising a number of theatres and stages. This has not yet been redeemed but we believe things are moving in the right direction — but very slowly. How can one hasten the process?

Cultural needs and necessities have a way to be ignored by governments and other agencies having the power to deliver. Yet expenditure on TV and radio and other things that publicise government activity but nevertheless have a very undermining influence on culture have been increasing by an incredible factor of 10. This is foolish and must stop.

RESULTS of the by-elections to the national Parliament on the 5th September have proved once again, sadly though, how much we humans have remained vulnerable to our whims and caprices and how little have we learned from history. In this case, very recent history. This has happened, despite repeated pronouncements of the authorities to ensure a free, fair and impartial election.

To the government and the Election Commission, the election was held smoothly and fairly, except for some minor untoward incidents at places of impact of which have been ignored. According to election observers, who could do only sample surveys, except for recording some violence, disturbances and obstructions in some centers, they did not observe irregularities enough to warrant repolling in any disputed constituency. As per reports of several journalists, eyewitness accounts of attempts at false voting, obstructions to voters and other irregularities were recorded, but no arrests were made and the concerned magistrates and presiding officers chose to remain anonymous. The BBC also reported of violence in several polling areas. For the opposition BNP, the by-election resulted in a massive rigging of various nature.

The BNP had already complained of massive rigging and decided repolling in two disputed constituencies. They also asked for resignation of the CEC for having been either partial to the ruling party or for its failure to conduct election properly. In order to press their demand, they laid a seize (gherao) of the Election

NOT since the Zulu warriors defeated the soldiers of the British empire earlier this century in South Africa, has a mighty modern army been defeated by a bunch of determined and daring ragtag guerrillas, on its own soil. Make no mistake, Russia's recent 'peace' treaty with the predominantly Muslim Chechen rebels is no more than a face-saving capitulation.

The residents of tiny Chechnya, the size of the state of Connecticut in the USA, are fiercely independent-minded people. Twice in the past, they had tried to free themselves of the shackles of Russia. Twice they paid dearly for it.

For centuries, czarist and communist Russia brutally attempted to snuff the life out of the indomitable people inhabiting the Caucasus region of southern Russia. The Russian communist dictator Stalin did so literally — he banished the whole population of Chechnya to Siberia, killing half of them in the process. He, too, failed to break their spirit.

Finally, when the USSR broke asunder in 1991, Chechnya, under its elected leader Dzhokar Dudayev, a former General in the Russian Air Force, declared its independence. Unfortunately for

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.

A couple of months of Awami League regime

Sir, It was very nice of Awami League administrators to offer their unconditional and sincere apology to the nation during their pre-election campaign for their misdeeds till 1975. They literally begged vote to the nation requesting to forgive their past misdeeds. They assured the people that if voted to power they will emerge as a different Awami League this time. Time and again they appealed to the nation to try them once more and assured so many good things including controlling terrorism by rounding up all the terrorists in no time.

Since BNP government totally failed in salvaging the nation from the ditch in every respect during their term in power, the nation accepted the apology and voted AL to power for the sake of a change.

But now it seems that this government is also not honouring their promises. They miserably failed to control terrorism which is fast increasing throughout the country. It seems that terrorists have caught Home Ministry by neck instead of Home Ministry catch terrorists by neck.

Home Minister seems to lack experience and maturity. This post should have gone to any of the party's stalwarts instead of a novice. It is questionable that what weight the Home Minister carries within his own party. His recent surprise visit was a total failure. He should have arrested the person on the spot and seized all the phensydil bottles when he was offered. He should have suspended a few police officers on the spot for negligence of duties. Publicity of the visit was unnecessarily too much and consequently all the smugglers have become very careful in dealing with their customers. His surprise visit caused adverse results to the interest of the country.

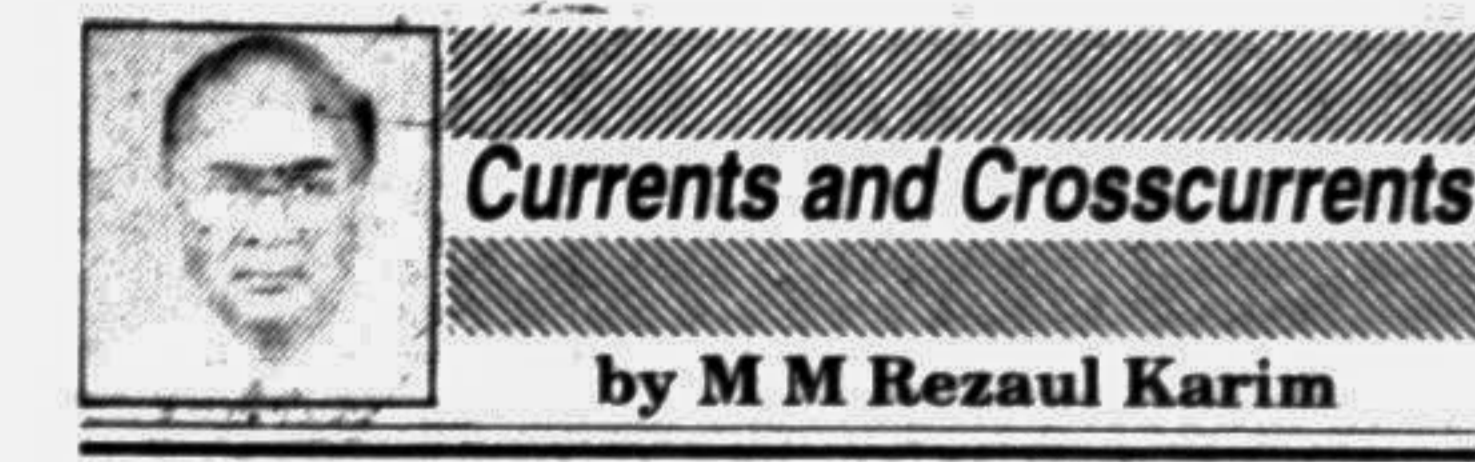
Now, a word about government's present policy. It looks like the government is busy in establishing the wrongdoings of BKSAL regime as right acts, through their speeches and a few recent moves. If the BKSAL regime was so good, why the present bunch of Awami League administrators apologised to

OUTCOME OF BY-ELECTION

An Opportunity Lost for the New Government?

The CEC claimed that he visited all the polling centers one BNP candidate had wanted him to visit. He, in fact, did visit, but only 3 of the 17 centers in which allegations of irregularities were made.

Commission peacefully and demanded, with an ultimatum, for re-polling in two seats. Let us try to analyse the situation objectively. Firstly, the Awami League won 8 seats in place; both the BNP and the Jatiya Party each lost 3 out of their surrendered 5. It, therefore, transpires that the ruling



Currents and Crosscurrents by M M Rezaul Karim

party ruled so well during the first two months of their rule that 60 per cent more of the electorate were converted as Awami Leaguers and 10 per cent of the BNP and the Jatiya Party supporters made volte face. It also suggests there should have been, substantial, perceptible and proportionate improvement in national sectors or areas of high importance, such as law and order, suppression of terrorism in and outside campuses, prices of essentials, li-

quidity position in money market, investment climate and confidence building, export performance, and so on and so forth.

In fact and as per published reports, the position, in most cases, appears just the opposite. It is, therefore, natural for the people to wonder as to how the ruling party was able to gain

such massive popular endorsement of their post-election policies and actions without corresponding record and demonstration of good governance in so brief a period. Consequently, many suspect, that too strongly, that the role of the Awami musclemen and of some self-seeking officials were prime movers in the elections of 5 September.

Secondly, the CEC had been warned well in advance by the BNP candidate about potential

Shabash Chechnya, Err, Ichkeria!

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

Russia retaliated by wiping out entire villages. Still, the Chechens remained a formidable foe. As in Afghanistan, the mothers of Russian soldiers on active duty in Chechnya took an active anti-war posture, forcing Kremlin into seek a non-military solution to the conflict.

Chechnya, unlike other distinct entities that made up the USSR, such as Ukraine and Georgia, and which broke away easily, Chechnya had the misfortune of being an integral part of the Russian Federation. Russia was not about to let its territorial integrity be violated.

For three years, Russia tried to overthrow Dudayev through its Chechen proxies. When that failed, Kremlin attacked Chechnya with 30,000 troops, in December, 1994. The West, including the US, supported the primacy of Russia's territorial integrity. Russian generals boasted that it would take them "two hours" to subdue the Chechen resistance. It is coming to two years!

Who can forget those dark days of December, 1994, when the Russian bombs leveled Grozny, the Chechen capital. Still, it took them months to capture Grozny in a hand to hand combat. The Russian victors could not sit tight. The rebels would invade the city at night and pick off Russian soldiers! Russia retaliated by wip-

ing out entire villages. Still, the Chechens remained a formidable foe. As in Afghanistan, the mothers of Russian soldiers on active duty in Chechnya took an active anti-war posture, forcing Kremlin into seek a non-military solution to the conflict.

Numerous ceasefires came and went, with neither side trusting the other. The Chechen rebels did not limit their operations inside Chechnya. Twice they went outside into Russia proper, and took whole towns hostage, to publicise their cause. The especially audacious one by Shamil Basayev stunned the whole world, and humiliated Russia further.

Much reluctantly, Russian President Boris N. Yeltsin, agreed to deal with Dudayev. Dzhokar Dudayev had no idea what kind of deal Mr Yeltsin had in mind for him. Dudayev used to negotiate over cellular phone. Earlier this year, the Russians lured him out of his bunker, in the pretext of negoti-

ating with a Moroccan Minister, located his position via satellite, and fired a missile at him! The killing of Dudayev would solve the Chechen problem, the Russians thought.

Were they wrong! Instead of folding, the Chechen rebels reorganised and did the unthinkable! They attacked and retook Grozny from the Russians, and then surrounded as many as 3,000 Russian soldiers in their barracks. There were little left for the mighty Russia to do but back away, or bomb Grozny — and its own soldiers in it — to dust!

In August, humiliated and desperate, the ailing Yeltsin empowered Russian national security adviser, former General Aleksandr I Lebed to negotiate with the rebels and end the war. Instead of following the Kremlin line and calling the Chechen rebels "bandits", Lebed referred to them as "skilled and dedicated fighters," earning their goodwill, and some trust.

The most recent peace agreement calls for the holding of a referendum within five

years on the Republic's future, and for Russia to honour the result of the referendum. There is no question that Mr Lebed and his Muslim adversaries — who greeted the news of an agreement with shouts of "Allahu Akbar" and "Lebed for President!" — have taken a giant step towards peace. Nor is there any question that many big steps remain before the smoldering plains and the soaring peaks of the Caucasus can be safe again.

It was not the political negotiating that brought this conflict to this conclusion, not even the deft work of Mr Lebed. What ended the war for now is the decisive battle of Grozny: the Russians lost it and could not continue. Having lost a war its citizens never supported, it is now possible for Russia to declare victory while sinking away! The Chechens are such ferocious fighters that they have managed to send tremors down the Russian spine!

Over the last decade, two Muslim guerrilla armies in two different countries pushed Europe's largest army into hum-

bling retreat. (The other was the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan). The Russian bear has been bloodied and mauled beyond recognition.

Although it is hard to imagine Russia rekindling its appetite for combat in Chechnya again, Chechnya's independence is not guaranteed. Russia may change its mind. Even if Russia does relent on the "territorial integrity" issue, independence will have come at a terrible price for the Chechens. Ninety thousand of its citizens, mostly civilians, fell to the Russians. Three times as many have been injured. For a nation of only one million-plus people, that is someone in every family! Chechens also lost their Father of the Nation, Dzhokar Dudayev, to the Russian missile.

Nevertheless, these days, as the Chechen rebels drive about in Grozny, their cars bear the rebel flag of Ichkeria, the name they would call their country. "The Russians can say what they want," said a rebel commander shooting his weapon in the air. "We won, and will drive them from our land!"

The writer is a Rhodes Scholar from Bangladesh, who currently lives in Princeton Junction, New Jersey, USA.

I had brought to his notice the situation we are facing to live in the chaotic surroundings created by the man power agency offices, medical check-up units, guest houses, where from the early morning to late-night job-seekers hang around and to meet their requirements vendors have set up shops all around the place. I recall with gratitude the patient hearing Mr. Hanif had given me and pointed out that as most of these business houses have trade licence, at that stage it was very difficult to take any action. But once the validity of the trade licence expires on June 30 the following year, DCC has taken a decision not to renew them.

We all know from the early part of 1995, The Mayor was pre-occupied with politics and he did not have time to look after DCC affairs. I congratulate him for his wonderful achievement in putting his political party back to power after 21 years and he no longer has to work with a hostile government.

We know the Mayor has a busy schedule. Will the Mayor now have time to depute some one from his office to move around Banani Model Town area (time during the day or evening) to see for himself the situation?

The report may be helpful to find out a solution to our problem.

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Residential problem at Islamic University

Sir, Although under the Islamic University Ordinance 1980, it was established as a residential university, most of the students are non-resident. It is a matter of great regret that after long nine years, only three residential halls have been constructed. The male students reside at Saddam Hossein and Ziaur Rahman halls and the female students reside at Khaleida Zia Hall. Out of 4500, merely 875 students have residential facilities. The teachers, officers and the employees are also suffering from serious housing problem.

At present the number of the teachers, officers and employees are respectively 153, 57 and 360 (2nd class 149, 3rd class 211). Only 16 teachers, 6 officers and 26 employees (3rd class 18, 4th class 8) of them are getting housing facilities. Insufficiency of hall and quarter of the residential problems of IU has become serious. Most of the students of IU live in Kushtia and Jhenidha both of

which are 25 km away from the campus. The students of this university have to travel 50-km everyday which is almost rare in Bangladesh.

The situation of the dining rooms of this university's halls are very low. Half of both of the dining rooms of Saddam Hossein and Ziaur Rahman halls is using as TV room. The environment and the food conditions of these halls are very bad. The medical center reports that most of the residential students are suffering from dysentery, diarrhoea etc. The university authority does not give any subsidy to the students.

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"Price control is better than new pay-scale"

Sir, After taking over the power the AL government has promised to declare new pay-scale for the government employees. It is a matter of great comfort for those who are not government employees because with the declaration of the new pay-scale the price of the necessary commodities increased in an unbridled way.

It should be borne in mind that a considerable number of people is not the government employees. So at present it is the claim of the conscious people to control the price-hike firstly and then if possible to declare the new pay-scale. If stern measures are taken against those who create artificial scarcity of commodities, the people of all quarters including the government employees will be able to breathe of pleasure and happiness.

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Millionaires in jail

Sir, The former president of Bangladesh was living in the central jail for more than five years as a convicted. The jail cost was very high, and the poor nation was to bear the bill. It is time to rewrite Jail Code prepared during British rule so that able and millionaires while in jail or custody, are compelled to bear the cost based on status and resources. Why a poor tax payer's money should be spent to provide balanced costly foods along with comfortable living for those millionaires? Let the new government decide the issue meticulously as I am sure that the money and manpower used for former president, is sufficient to meet the healthcare of all the squatter settlers of Dhaka or so let the authority look into it seriously!

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To BTB

Sir, In our country football is the most popular game and Dhaka Premier Division Football League is considered the most attractive football tournament. Crores of football fans all around the country eagerly wish to watch the big matches. But it is impossible for them to travel from a long distance and watch the game at Dhaka Stadium. Only possible way for them to enjoy the games is through BTB.

But it has been observed that BTB do not telecast any sports programme regularly which can be termed as insensitive, at best sports programmes and live telecast of important football, cricket or hockey matches can attract young generation into games instead of running their lines. So in this situation BTB can at least telecast the major football matches of top teams like Abahani, Mohammedan, Mukhtijoddah and Brothers Union.

We would like to mention here that except BTB, all the TV broadcasting centres all over the world telecast sports programme regularly through different channels. So it is earnestly expected that BTB would take necessary steps to telecast at least major matches at Dhaka football league regularly.

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