

River of Hopes

How the Ganges basin people on the Bangladesh side had been pining for water was depicted with a historic poignance on January 1, the day the Indo-Bangla water treaty took effect. One wished the spectacle had been photographed with a professional sense of anticipation rather than left to merely printed words to conjure it up.

Thousands of people trekking from different parts of Rajshahi district, converged on both banks of the Padma hoping high to glimpse an instant spate in the river with their naked eyes by a magical virtue of the water accord signed by India and Bangladesh on December 12. What they were longing to see is still some way off, critically hinges as that prospect on sustained higher flows.

Most certainly, on the new year's day, the water level increased to 11.77 metres as against 10.78 metres recorded on January 1 last year. Besides, at the much-vaunted Hardinge Bridge point, it showed 7.25 metres compared with 6.78 metres on 1st of January 1996.

The upbeat expectancy among our countrymen for a steady and incremental accrual of benefits from the treaty is a tribute paid to its authors. It also increases the responsibility of the joint technical or monitoring committee to ensure a flawless implementation of the accord.

With the 30-year Ganges water treaty in place, a strong foundation is deemed to have been laid for extended bilateral cooperation in regard to 53 other common rivers with India. This can happen within the framework of an inter-basin development strategy. Furthermore, Bangladesh finds itself in a position now to draw up a comprehensive water use plan with her intra-basin development projects standing a chance of being financed willingly by donors. These projects were in doldrums owing to the long-drawn absence of any durable-looking water treaty with India.

In the not-too-distant a future we are hoping to see marked improvements taking place in the areas of navigation, salinity intrusions, fish-culture, ecology and geo-morphology with an all-round benign effect on at least four crore people of Bangladesh.

Threat to Free of Press

In Chittagong newspaper offices are coming under increasing threats. After the shooting incident at the Janakantha office in Chittagong, it is the Dainik Azadi that has been the target of the terrorists' rage. A gang came with a press release straight up to the newsroom and threatened journalists with dire consequences if it was not published the next day. At the time of their departure the mastans broke the press box into pieces.

Attacks on newspaper offices or newsmen are nothing new in this country. But in recent times such incidents have become rarer. From that stand-point, the fresh spate of terrorism in Chittagong and some other places is indeed a cause for concern. A Janakantha correspondent of Tangail who was covering terrorist activities there had to flee to Dhaka to escape the wrath of the local feuding mastans. Such physical attacks on newspapers and newsmen have been carried out almost routinely whenever journalist tried to uncover the details of the crime world.

You can condemn them, you can try to impart moral advice to them but criminals are not going to change their ways unless they are made to. For a long time, they have been used to holding the society hostage, thanks to political patronage. And there is no reason to think that the political parties have a high regard for press freedom either. For many of them, press freedom only means the freedom to support them. If the truth is too damaging they would not hesitate to attack the paper or the author who has brought it to light. The inviolability of the press will be best safeguarded if the country can develop a healthy political culture. Respect for other's opinion can have its beneficial influence on the society as a whole. Journalists can enjoy their freedom and the right to information if the rest of the society opt for creating a conducive atmosphere for the same. The government must discharge its responsibilities in this behalf because it is best equipped for the purpose, and because it is best served by a free press.

Shallow Revelry

The advent of a new year is always a matter of joy and celebration. But for some years now the celebrative mood in a social segment has been outrageously uproarious. This year the criminal elements in a posh area were able to add a new and condemnable chapter to it all. They assaulted some girls and women after dragging them out of their cars. A good occasion for even a soul-full, celebration took an ugly turn.

These so-called revellers pose a direct threat to law and order and an indirect threat to our culture. The thing is, it can get trendy. The fact that at least 25 revellers got injured and scores of cars were damaged by the more aggressive of them is proof of such an annual occasion getting worse by each passing year. No wonder, the police had to intervene.

We would like to add that anti-social elements also take advantage of the situation and create trouble. We do not see any harm if the boisterous lot revel in their own houses or compounds but when they bring their uncontrolled enthusiasm on to the streets, they ought to be legally dealt with. It is not only a matter of public nuisance but also a bad precedent, culturewise. This kind of overdoing on the one hand, and the absence of healthy entertainment on the other, cannot be good for society.

Corruption Astrings Subcontinent

It is anybody's guess but the figure may be around Rs 40,000 crore in the three countries. Most of the money is parked abroad. And if ever the full story of how it was made comes out, it will show that no government deal or contract was without the kickbacks.

transaction which brought them money under official favour. This side of his character was little known. The most charitable explanation is that he purchased the support of his party stalwarts because he was a stopgap arrangement when Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated and not even a member of the parliament when he became prime minister.

Lack of action on the bank scam, now estimated at Rs 15,000 crore, was people's first shock. Most of Rao's ministers had been named in the unanimous parliamentary committee report. It was no worse than his effort to hide the names of recipients of Bofors gun kickbacks through his foreign minister Solanki, who was sent to the Swiss government to go slow on disclosures. The manner in which he managed to have the minority government of his Congress party to command a majority in the Lok Sabha made him the wildest and the most astute politician on the Indian scene. But it is now common knowledge how he did it. He would rather be prime minister than be right.

The urea scandal in the last few weeks of his government indicates how contemptuous he had become of public opinion. His ministers knew that if they could not play according to his rules, he would break the game. When he was being pulled down from the leadership of parliamentary party, he found that his supporters were not particu-

lar about him but about how the wind was blowing. He tried to remind them of the leeway he had given them to make money. What he forgot was that he did not have the string of their purse in his hand. He was no more the prime minister and had no clout to make or mar them. Practically, all of them stabbed him in the back, one by one. A seasoned politician like him failed to realise that the structure built through prize or pressure would collapse once the leverage of power deserted him.

the businessmen and that Benazir Bhutto used her cabinet as a processing machine. In her earlier stint he was called Mr 10 per cent. This time he was Mr 40 per cent. Even ministers realised that their operation had got limited.

Still when she returned from London, so many hopes were pinned on her. She was skyrocketed too young, too fast. With power, she lost balance and became arrogant, contemptuous of the authorities and her colleagues. She was tactless and flew into political rages. Her at-

is perhaps to feed politicians and government services with graft and corruption, the extent of which went beyond proportions.

Khaleda Zia came in an aura of homage paid to her husband, Ziaur Rahman, the late Bangladesh President. She vited that atmosphere. Incapable of dealing with problems of her country, she became aloof from reality and gave in to her flatterers. They allegedly made money right and left and she perhaps considered it a fair price to pay for their loyalty. She is no intellectual, and unlike Rao and Benazir Bhutto, she did not have any political background. But that alone does not explain her lack of vision. Instead of calming the strife in her country, she rather brought a storm on Bangladesh, never known before.

Whether Sheikh Hasina will pursue the allegations of corruption against Khaleda Zia and her cabinet colleagues is not known but there is concern about the many deals they transacted. One of the reasons why she lost at the polls was the tainted reputation that her Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) had come to acquire.

The corruption has sucked up thousands of crores from the system, which is already waiting for breath because of limited resources in the subcontinent. The poor suffer the most. Their money goes down or gets stuck. The growth rate slides.

On the other hand, it pro-

voles resentment because it involves some basic issues of cleanliness and fairplay. The argument that corruption is all over the world does not convince an ordinary man who feels that if people at high places had not cheated, his life would have been a bit better. He feels more and more cornered because there is no segment of government, from top to bottom, which is free from corruption. If he wants a railway ticket, a gas connection or a water meter, he has to pay. Nothing comes through normal channels. Some have given the graft the name of speed money. According to him, it is downright dishonesty.

Thanks to the three outgoing prime ministers, corruption and politics are synonymous now. There is no question of ethics or norms. Even the ordinary consideration that government servants are public servants is gone. And politicians are their protectors because some part of the money made comes to them as well.

Still, a new year brings new hopes. Between December 31 and January 1, there is a difference of only one day or, for that matter, one night. Yet, there is a feeling of change, of a new vista. Troubles may not have lessened but the pile suddenly seems lighter than before. The problem of corruption would look more manageable if the peoples in the subcontinent were to look down upon the dishonest. Not long ago, it was not fashionable to mix with those who did not have clean reputation. Why not revive a social boycott of corrupt politicians, officials, businessmen and even journalists?

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

Benazir Bhutto's case was a bit different. She was not ousted by her party but by Pakistan President Farooq Leghari. Still, the core issue was the same: Corruption. She too allowed her ministers and close relations to make money even if they bended or broke rules and regulations. In her case, the relative, her own husband, Asif Ali Zardari, indulged in so many underhand deals that the amount runs into hundreds of crores. He was the de facto prime minister.

According to an interview by Leghari, Zardari had opened a shop at the prime minister's house to strike bargains with

titutes were not always constant except in favour of her husband. Her courage and bitterness were not their propertions.

In a country like Pakistan, she is liberal. But liberals can accomplish a great deal if they happen to fasten upon right causes. If not, they are a failure. Benazir's cause was her husband, who turned out to be one of the most corrupt politicians of the subcontinent. She rather divided Pakistan to rule, and he helped her in the task when he was not making money. They have made the country ungovernable. The greatest harm that she and Zardari have done

China's Self-Image in the Post-Cold War Era

It is imperative to understand how China's perceptual dynamics are transformed in the post-Cold War period and its diplomatic undertakings are likely to manifest themselves by its emergence as a major world power, writes Dr Abul Kalam

FOR a long time after the emergence of the People's Republic, China was an almost inward-looking power, viewed as a sort of introvert, maintaining a restricted posture and often being an object rather than a subject of international diplomacy. China was then committed to a course of revolutionary fervour which was perceived necessary for national reconstruction and consolidation of the fruits of people's revolution. But a new China was in the making, consistent with the vision and the dynamic leadership of Mao Zedong, the father-figure of the Chinese revolution, who developed and operationalized a revolutionary blueprint or framework of action through which China was liberated and who wanted to build China as a model for the developing world. In the decades ahead, Mao also innovated a somewhat similar framework and motivated the Chinese nation to undergo a tortuous but simultaneous process of national construction and revolution, a process which was readjusted for the purpose of development in the changing context of international relations by the subsequent Chinese leadership to transform China as a major player in world affairs. There were two contrasting images of China at work, one of a revolutionary and the other of a modernizer, which seem to be baffling.

Now that China has opened up itself and has been witnessing sweeping reforms in its thrust toward development, she has indeed increasingly emerged as a major power player and is also viewed as 'the central preoccupation' of the Asia-Pacific region. Therefore, it is imperative to understand notionally how China's perceptual dynamics are transformed in the post-Cold War period and its diplomatic undertakings are likely to manifest themselves by its emergence as a major world power.

The Chinese foreign policy, in essence, represents a mixture of idealism and realism: this means that there are ideological predilections conditioning Chinese diplomatic initiatives, providing the thread of conceptual linkage and, at the same time, there are realistic concerns or concrete issue areas of decision-making which tend to serve as the underpinnings, affecting matters of vital national interests and motivating the Chinese leadership in the formulation of their diplomatic objectives.

Revolutionary Image

In the earlier decades internationally China under Mao had a revolutionary image. Because of the domestic requirements of national construction and transition of China from a bourgeois-feudal status to a democratic-national state, ensuring people's participation at every stage of national life, Mao then conceptualized and made operational a strategy of 'permanent war' or 'uninterrupted revolution', implementing it through a battery of tactical phases such as 'Socialist Education, Re-education and Rectification Campaigns', 'Great Leap Forward', 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution' etc. The movement toward opening to the outside world began while Mao was still alive through an articulation of the slogan of 'Four Modernizations', embracing all-round reforms in agriculture, industry, science and technology, and last but not least in defence. The programme for modernization was in full-swing in late 1970s and carried through the 1980s.

China's international posture in the entire post-liberation period had swung back and forth between international isolationism and integration. However, its basic preoccupation had always been its national development (despite some internal debates and differences on appropriate strategy and tactics) and its somewhat obsession of self-preservation i. e. defence of its socio-

economic fabric against what it perceived alien influences. In the tearing down of 'Democracy Wall' of 1979, in the drive against 'spiritual pollution' of 1983, in the 'anti-bourgeois liberalization' campaign, and in the violent suppression of the 'pro-democracy' campaign of May-June 1989, Beijing not only sought to contain domestic turmoil, but also to deter or stamp out unsettling (alien or subversive) influences so that a sustained and the record high level growth of the economy can be ensured.

'Peace Paradigm'

However, since the mid-1980s Beijing also advanced the new idealistic concept of a 'socialist commodity economy', repudiating, in essence, the Marxist-Leninist conception of capitalism as inherently doomed. Domestically, in terms of operational management, it entailed a blend of central planning and market forces, and in international relations it emphasized a 'new era' based on growing 'interdependence' and the system of one world market. The new focus on economic cooperation with Japan and the West, China's domestic and external policies were thus once again intertwined, marked by the principle of 'co-existence' between socialism and capitalism, both at home and abroad. Thus, in contrast to the revolutionary image of the Mao era, a 'peace paradigm' began to emerge in China's strategic posture and international outlook, based on superpower detente, disarmament and Panchsheel.

In realistic terms, the new peace image was intended to bring about rich dividends, reducing the need for heavy defence expenditure, modernizing the various sectors of the economy through foreign investment and technology. The new foreign policy posture thus would not only be intended to

ensure China's modernization at a rapid pace and attain progress in negotiations over national re-unification, but also help create a non-threatening environment around China and enhance its international role and great power status.

Post-Cold War Trends

China's foreign policy imperatives in the post-Cold War era includes: i) the continuing emphasis on economic cooperation

in the security calculations of the major powers, including the US; ii) the downgrading of ideology and an increasing recognition of the virtues of pragmatic approaches to foreign policy issues; and iii) a renewed emphasis on 'peaceful reunification of the motherland.' In China the operating principle has turned from class struggle and self-reliance to the famous saying of Deng Xiaoping: 'It does not matter if the cat is white or black as long as it catches mice. Use every means to raise production.'

Being 'the largest booming economy in the world', there is an over-riding economic consciousness guiding contemporary Chinese foreign policy, with a growth rate of over 10 per cent, a rare occurrence in history of world economic development. Such an average annual growth rate over the next 15 years is projected to rank China among the leading economic powers of the world.

Primacy of Economics

Consistent with the post-Cold War global trend, China sought to develop an effective strategy to safeguard its economic security so as to broaden its channels to absorb more advanced foreign technologies in order to accelerate its technological development, for both military and civilian use. Articulated in negative terms: China does not seek world or regional hegemony, nor does it

station any troops or set up any bases in any foreign country. Its 'national defence construction is not directed against any country, and thus does not pose a threat to any country.'

Open Market Approach

Thus the rapid strides towards economic development and an adoption of an open market approach in recent years by a 'socialist' country such as China, now known to be more open than the most liberal democracies such as the US and Japan, speak of high sense of dynamism and pragmatism of the Chinese leadership, though not quite oblivious of its military security needs, including the need for a sophisticated nuclear defence system.

However, Beijing sees its national defence as being subordinate to and in service of the nation's overall economic construction upholding the principle of 'combining peacetime with wartime' and integrating the army with the people. To attain such strategic ends, China candidly views that it needs a peaceful environment in order to be able to devote itself completely to its socialist modernization programme.

Despite the tumultuous events of 1989 and sharp Western response to Beijing's suppression of pro-democracy demonstrations at Tiananmen Square, China has currently kept open its channels of communication with the outside world, re-committed itself to the course of development, reforms and modernization. It

remains eager to attract foreign capital, technology and know-how, seeking to maintain opportunities for trade and investment. Given its commitment to modernization and open market, China is likely to continue the present effort to widen its contacts with the outside world. It has developed a special interest to broaden its contacts with the neighbouring regions of South, East and Southeast Asia, despite the existence of contentious issues of varied nature with many countries of these regions. This should provide as an example for other countries in the Third World.

Thus the last few decades witnessed sharp fluctuation in China's self-image. Shifting from a stance of extreme radicalism and revolution-making, Beijing has currently focused its interest on a 'peace paradigm', having been fully committed to a process of 'socialist' reform, modernization and open market. It has pursued such a peace outlook with marked dynamism, speed and versatility. As 'the fastest growing economy of the world' China is currently seen with envy and admiration by many a nation of the world, and has indeed become a model for the developing countries, as Mao had envisioned. The restricted self-image of the earlier decades has given way to that of an emerging economic giant, with worldwide multiple economic and trade links, to a regional leadership position and possibly to that of a global catalyst reshaping the destiny of mankind in the 21st century.

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OPINION

Promoting a Better Economy

Tanvir Ahmed

When the present government came to power almost six months ago, I remember quite well, it promised us a better economy than the previous one. It was their opinion that in order to reduce poverty, the country in this fiscal year needed a GDP growth rate of 7 per cent or more. It was also their belief that such a rate should not be difficult to attain, if proper steps were taken. I do not know whether the government has taken any of those 'proper steps', but there are some other actions I find disturbing, and am sure they will, no matter how little, slow the pace of progress.

The first among these actions is the sudden declaration of December 15 as a holiday to celebrate independence. Since December 16 is already a national holiday for that cause, I do not see the need for another holiday, not even for celebrating the Silver Jubilee of our independence. Such an act seriously hinders the process of business forecasting and planning, which is essential for our companies to survive in a fiercely-competitive global economy. It also sends a negative signal to foreign investors that Bangladesh acts more on impulse rather than on reason. Moreover, in an economy like ours, people need to work as hard as possible. Therefore, the fewer holidays are, the better.

Permitting important roads and streets to be blocked by processions and make-shift stages almost everyday tantamounts to disregard the sufferings of others. The roads of Dhaka are already heavily congested and this only adds to the city's terrible traffic problem. I wonder why the government ever thought of attaining growth

rate of 7 per cent, and then allowing such a nuisance to take place.

The two stock markets of the country fell into total chaos. When it was obvious to many that the indexes of both the markets were rising 'too high', the government's efforts at that time were less than expected. Now, when the markets have nosedived, the government's stance is still unclear. The present situation in the markets implies both lack of government control and sympathy. Genuine prospective foreign investors would definitely not invest in a country whose capital markets are so volatile and unstable. Also, free market economy does not mean stealing the money of small, defenceless investors.

Abrupt changes in key positions of various important organisations were made. If the government wishes to pursue any economic reforms started by the previous government, as it often claims, such moves will only create panic and confusion in the whole economic system, thus inhibiting the implementation of any reforms.

Curbing terrorism is a failure. Unless terrorism is reduced to a more acceptable level, no business, either foreign or local, can prosper. Blaming all terrorist acts on the opposition is useless, since businesses will still not be able to expand in the present law and order situation.

In order to build a strong economy, a country needs carefully formulated policies. One should remember that slogans and statements may be enough to take a political party into power, but it is not enough to produce positive results in the country's economy.

To the Editor...

Why not mother's name?

Sir, In this age, women in comparison with men are not lagging behind in any ways. To earn their bread and honour, they are now competing with men, making their social importance felt.

But regrettably, there is no provision to use their names as an accompanying identity with any candidate's address in any 'application form' in the place of father's or husband's name, whether they are alive or dead. Only in some special cases, legal guardian's name, who also is a male, is allowed on the application form later on.

I think with a view to establishing equality in every sphere of life, the right to use the candidate's mother's name should be materialised. Then the candidate would choose whose names/he would take.

Afsana Chowdhury Emu  
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Maternity facility

Sir, Nowadays, almost in all arena of work, women are working side by side with male workers. Day by day women workforce is increasing considerably. One of the most important times during women lifespan are their pregnancy period. It is time to think about the existing laws in Bangladesh of the working women to extend maternity facilities to encourage and honour them.

A woman doing a government job and having at least served for nine months can get

maternity leave for 12 weeks. But this law is not followed by all the organisations, private firms and by garment factories. The maternity leave should be extended and the government should take steps to implement this law in all arena of work.

On the Breastfeeding Day this year, one minister said that maternity leave should be extended up to six months. We hope, the present government will finalise this basic human right of women at the earliest.

Mahfuza Begum  
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UN and the Ganges

Sir, During the partition of '47 and also at the time of the Liberation of Bangladesh in '71, nobody ever imagined that India would one day stop the flow of an international river. But India really did so in April 1975, throwing millions of people of our country into the abyss of darkness, uncertainty and untold sufferings for a long period of 20 years without any humane consideration.

However, India has at last rescinded its earlier unilateral and arbitrary decision of April 1975 and has signed the 30-year historic Ganges water treaty on December 12, 1996.

The treaty is not a singular achievement of any particular political leader or party. Rather it is a collective accomplishment of a great humanitarian task of all peace-loving people of the world.

In view of the facts and un-

certain political situation all over the world, and also, for the sake of welfare of mankind, human rights of the people and for maintenance of peace, we would request the United Nations General Assembly to kindly ratify the historic Ganges water treaty and to make sure that in the future all the nations can equitably share water of the international rivers.

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A metaphysical question

Sir, A question has arisen in my mind, to which I seek the opinion of your learned readers. I go to a masjid open to the public. There I raise my hands in *munajat* (prayer) officially or privately, regardless of my job, rank, status or source of earning. How do my fellow beings look at it, and how God does look at it? It is not necessary to publicise whether I went there in my personal capacity for a personal obligation (to offer prayer or *munajat*). My post cannot offer the prayer; I can, as a human being. The ordinary anonymous citizen has no problem, compared to the high public dignitaries and VIPs. I have been to many urs of saints and saints where I have talked to strangers, some of whom were high dignitaries, but they never revealed their mundane position in this life.

I know of some close ac-

quaintances who are not keen to reveal or show how "religious" they were or how was their relationship with God, by talk, dress or rituals. All are equal before the Lord, and we cannot foresee His judgement.

A citizen  
Dhaka

To whom it may concern

Sir, I am an American citizen but my roots are here and someday I and my three children hope to come back to Dhaka to stay. But my only qualm is the lack of proper sanitary facilities and garbage containers which are spoiling the beauty of this city. Why will my children (not only mine but also more like them who are getting their education in the States) come back to a country where they see men urinating and defecating by the roadside. I also have many foreign friends who ask me about the tourism in Bangladesh but I cannot encourage them as I am ashamed of this situation. Basic toilets do not involve any major costs and there is an abundance of manpower here to maintain them.

Please keep this serious project in mind for the future development of this golden country. Why not start with Road 32, Dhanmondi, Dhaka as a sign of respect to Bangabandhu's residence and museum.

One who's concerned