

## Ties With Tokyo

The high point of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Japan is discernible in the response she has been able to secure from the host government to Bangladesh's development needs as visualised against the backdrop of recent changes in the regional outlook. Not only has the Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto recognised the importance of Mongla port and Rupsha Bridge for the sake of giving Bangladesh an infrastructural depth but also for lending us a hand in giving land-locked Nepal an easy access through Bangladesh. India has already allowed passage of Nepalese goods through her territory, so that what remains to be done is an effectualisation of it by an extension through a Bangladesh port to the maritime world. Similarly, the Ganges Barrage Project has not merely become feasible as a result of the long-duration water accord with India but also for the fact that it is urgently needed to be constructed as part of a national water management strategy. Japan has indicated her willingness to fund the building of Rupsha Bridge and development of Mongla port. On the Ganges Barrage project, she has promised to finance technical studies at this stage keeping her windows open for concerted funding with big donors when the time comes for it. It is significant that Japanese PM referred to our premier's overture with the G-7 countries for raising the level of assistance to the LDCs. Japan's hands on the question were strengthened as the only Asian member of the G-7, added Mr. Hashimoto.

Tokyo-Dhaka ties are on a rejuvenation course following the warm-up phase one has already witnessed in the resumption of Japanese ODA to Bangladesh after a two-year freeze on it. The special thrusts being given for new and expanded cooperation are clearly identifiable in the accord signed on the protection and promotion of investment and the three agreements made for soft loans amounting to 15.25 billion yen or Tk 525 crore. The agreement concluded on the new international airport in Chittagong is also a welcome piece of news.

Japan has been a tower of strength for our infrastructure development projects, but it is time her attention turned to the special EPZ and relocation of her textile units so as to help us build appropriate backward linkages to the RMG sector.

With Japan we have had a series of understandings reached at the state level and between our private sectors. Have we been following these up vigorously?

## Dutiful but Unrewarded

A seventeen-member security staff of a closed factory in Tongi has reportedly decided to go for collective suicide to protest alleged maltreatment they are being subjected to. For 11 months the factory has remained closed and all the workers have left but the services of securitymen have neither been terminated nor are they being given their salaries. Repeated appeals for either payment or termination with benefits have fallen on deaf ears. A desperate appeal to the deputy commissioner of Gazipur for redress reportedly elicited a response advising them to file cases with an appropriate court.

Now the irony is that the security personnel cannot seek help from a court because of lack of means. With water, gas and power lines disconnected, the men are in a most helpless situation. Forced to starve, they cannot even submit the guns and bullets to the authority. Apparently, the management of the factory has no concern about the fate of these people who have served and are still serving there. That the 17 men are dutiful is clear. They want to return the arms back to the authority so that they can come out with their career records clean. Even after being forced to live in sub-human conditions they are apparently proving to be conscientious.

Unless the threat of mass suicide is a publicity stunt and if they carry out the threat, who will be responsible for the tragedy? Factories may be closed but there are certainly rules to be followed. We urge the labour and industry ministries to look into the matter urgently. The management of the factory must be made to go by the rules so that the securitymen receive justice.

## Peace Prospect in CHT

Anticipating that a peace agreement between the Parbatta Chittagong Janasanghati Samity (PCJSS) and the government is round the corner, activists of a faction of the Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP) have reportedly started enlisting themselves with the Shantibahini. This is to avail themselves of the opportunity being offered by the government in the form of rehabilitating all Shantibahinim following a peace accord. The PCP faction that supports PCJSS president Shantu Larma is seizing the opportunity. Let there be not even a feeble voice of dissent in the Shantibahini ranks about the peace deal.

A peace accord such as the proposed one rests on fair play and sincerity on the part of both sides. Now PCP activists are crossing the border to prove their bona fides as Shantibahini cadres. Can experience be of any help to screen any fake Shantibahini claimants from the genuine members. After all, the PCJSS may one day face its own problem with intruders if any. That should be impressed upon the leaders of the PCJSS.

Shantibahinim stopped quite sometime ago from availing of the amnesty offered by the government largely because they smell a peace deal in the air. That is understandable; they are just expectantly waiting to get the benefit in a body and at a time. We want the tribal people to be fully unified in their greetings to the olive branch that is about to spread across the hills.

# Turning Points in Hong Kong's History

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EVERY world city has a smell of its own that one gets when disembarking at its airport for the first time. In Hong Kong, they say, you take a sniff of fresh currency notes on the first day of your arrival. Obviously, this is not meant to be evocative of the muscular greed for money displayed in the extortionist culture of our indigenous variety but to extol the virtues of free enterprise taken to its perfectionist best in Hong Kong.

So ingrained is the system of business values in Hong Kong and this has filtered through such a historical series of ups and downs (which this write-up is all about) that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under Chinese suzerainty is destined to retain its pro-money market characteristics no matter what. The Chinese emphasis on traditional values, educational training and collective ethos as marks of nationalist distinctions needs to have the Republican temper of democracy to be symbiotic with free initiatives.

If the line should get blurred, the raw dynamism that Hong Kong has exemplified through the mutually reinforcing currents of 'change creating bustle and bustle creating change' will be stunted to the disadvantage of all concerned.

The strengths of Hong Kong

Special Administrative Region lie in its history. The British turned their eyes to Hong Kong around 1839 with a view to smuggling opium from India into China where it was banned to yield them good money. The first Opium War between China and Britain followed with the latter winning it after having bombarded Chinese ports that refused to accept shipments of opium. Britain gained control of Hong Kong under the Treaty of Nanking and the Union Jack was raised on June 26, 1841.

The Second Opium and further conflicts took place between 1856-1860 at the end of which the Kowloon peninsula and the Stonecutter Island were ceded to Britain in 1898. China under The Ching dynasty leased the new territories to Britain for 99 years.

Chinese President Jiang Zemin in his speech at the handover ceremony on June 30, 1997, referred to 'unequal treaties' China had signed with Britain under the Ching dynasty. The official position of China has, therefore, been that sovereignty over Hong Kong was never lost to Britain, it was only held under suspension by

unequal treaties.

The British hand seemed stained by the historical fact of their having taken control of Hong Kong. Kowloon peninsula and Stonecutter Island via the poppy trade motive and any casual reader of Chinese history would vouchsafe how dazed the opium-addicted Chinese people remained for nearly a century.

In 1982 talks on the future of

Hong Kong between 1941 and 1945. The British Army surrendered Hong Kong to Japan in the early stages of the Second Great War. This made Winston Churchill extremely unhappy until the British regained control of Hong Kong following the Japanese surrender in 1945. Earlier, the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 had seen the Japanese advance into China rapidly with the result that there fol-

Hong Kong began in earnest between Great Britain and the People's Republic of China. Margaret Thatcher is known to have first argued with Deng Xiaoping for continued British administration over Hong Kong, but quite predictably failed to carry her point with Deng.

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the 99-year lease period. Con-

sequently, the Basic Law came to be formulated for the administration of Hong Kong on the mutually agreed 'one country, two systems' basis with defence and foreign affairs vesting in the central authorities and a high degree of autonomy granted to the regional administration in all other matters. But the legislature has been reconstituted with a fifty per cent presence of Chinese government nominees in it and its character would only be established after the new elections, due in May next year, are held.

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The British sovereignty over Hong Kong came under assault from the mainland in 1966-67 when the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China spread to Hong Kong after the nearby Portuguese

Colony of Macau had capitulated before the extremist pressure of the cultural zealots. Macau formally returns to China in December, 1999.

British Control of Hong Kong was also endangered by the ripple effects of Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. Britain succeeded in bringing back order on both occasions largely because of the implicit backing of the local residents who did not have the mental conditioning of the mainland Chinese to be able to appreciate their high-voltage political adventurism. In fact, there were Chinese on those two occasions who came to Hong Kong fleeing trouble in the mainland.

Perhaps a gem of an attribution is made to former Chinese Premier Zhou EnLai who reminded in Hong Kong that China benefited from Hong Kong's prosperity.

Hong Kong's economy is one-fifth the size of Chinese economy and she has the fifth largest foreign exchange reserve in the world (60 billion dollars). Yet the country did not raise any clamour for self-determination, a political demand one is single-minded devotion to their economy.



## Time and Tide

Shah Husain Imam

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America have improved substantially."

It was Sunday when I met him. But there is no such thing as Saturday or Sunday for him. The ministries I have handled before becoming prime minister were like a kindergarten," says Gujral. "Even after putting in 16 hours I find I cannot finish the day's work." Travelling makes it still worse. "I reject 50 per cent of requests. Even then, I have to travel most of the time."

"But this helps me to stay in contact with the country," says Gujral. "One feels depressed in Delhi because the people here are all the time concentrating on Lajoo or the price of petroleum products. I use my visits to the states to put before the chief ministers the concept I want the nation to follow. I can write it on paper but I am able to put across it better through talks."

The concept or dream, whatever it is, the prime minister is full of it. Indians will string along with him, provided he gives them back their hope — and faith — in the country.

## Conversing with Gujral

*The breakthrough at Islamabad does not surprise Gujral. "I am an optimist and I believe that relations with Pakistan will vastly improve." The prime minister has no doubt that the two countries are moving towards an era of conciliation*

"I am a one-term prime minister. I have no ambition to come back. Once it is over, it is over, I go home," Prime Minister Inder Kumar Singh says. It was not an interview. I was talking to him alone, informally a few days ago at his residence, 7, Race Course Road.

No, he will not try to stay back. Nor will he put one against another to save himself. There is no question of manipulation. He sits light in the chair. Indeed, this is his strength.

Feuds in his party, the Janata Dal, torment him. But he is determined to stay distant. He was offered the presidentship of the party. Still he said no. "I do not want to get into all this." By getting involved in the nitty-gritty of politics he feels he will lose sight of the purpose he has in view.

He wants to give a 'concept' to the country. "Wherever I go I tell the state chief ministers about it." He proposes to write a fortnightly letter to them as Jawaharlal Nehru did. He believes the nation has lost the vision it had before it. He wishes to reiterate it. "We must refocus our attention on that vision," he says.

"Nehru was all the time talking about the vision," says Gujral. "That will give the country a sense of direction which it needs." It is clear that the prime minister follows principle rather than the exigencies of politics. He will state the truth that is in him at all costs.

How different he sounds from the prime ministers I have met at the Race Course Road residence. He is warm, effusive and completely relaxed despite the everyday problems of the coal-

ition government he heads. He has the gift of analysis and clear, forceful statement. Above all, he uses his gifts for the common people and not for spoliation, political or economic.

Otherwise, the residence is the same. You go over the same exercise of security. A noiseless car takes you to the porch of the house and a white-clad peon conducts you to the waiting room, which has not changed in decor over the years. However, the drawing room has a new look. Large paintings by Husain and a Satish Gujral, the prime minister's younger brother, cover the walls. A few pots of saplings against a well-curtained window cuts direct sun. Some thinking has gone behind it and this reflects sensitivity to beauty and the arts. Indira Gandhi, too, had an aesthetic touch but she never lived in the house.

"I do not want many files to come to me," says Gujral. "In fact, I have already distributed work in such a way that very few papers come to me. I want to concentrate on reviving the ethos of the country and that of the national movement." Gujral, his father and his mother — all went to jail many times during the British rule.

Turning to present situation, I ask: Why did he not remove Laloo Prasad Yadav from the Bihar chief ministership straightaway? In reply, he says:

"In India, people confuse authority with authoritarianism. Had I acted then, I would have been considered an authoritarian.

Talks are taking place with the underground Nagas and the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), Gujral says. He does not want to elaborate it since the negotiations are at a

critical stage. But he is sure that there will be a 'ceasefire' both in Nagaland and Assam before August 15. This will be, indeed, an achievement because the area has not experienced peace for decades.

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## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

He is proud to have reconstructed the policy after Nehru. He feels satisfied over what he has done, although he is reluctant to use the phrase, 'Gujral doctrine', to describe his efforts. He says the water treaty with Bangladesh is already paying dividends in the north-east. "When I was there three weeks ago, I could see the results." The right of passage given to Nepal, Gujral is confident, will push up its trade with Bangladesh and beyond and will also benefit the north-eastern states as well. (Once he agreed to the passage, both Nepalese prime minister and foreign minister said that they themselves had been investigating anti-India feeling. But now they were convinced of India's friendly bonafides after Gujral's visit.)

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am an optimist and I believe that relations with Pakistan will vastly improve." (He was yet to meet the outgoing foreign secretary Salmaan Haider.) The prime minister has no doubt that the two countries are moving towards an era of conciliation and friendship, turning a new leaf, leaving behind

the phase of rancour, enmity and confrontation. He specifically mentions the purchase of power, 3,000 Kws, from Pakistan. Once that comes through, Ludhiana and other parts of Punjab will prosper. And the purchase of power will follow trade. Pakistan will also gain. It is a question of time.

The prime minister says that he has departed from the old practice of sending politicians abroad for establishing contacts with foreign governments. Cabinet secretary Subramanian is back after visiting Washington. He appears to have had a satisfactory round of talks with the State Department. In fact, he was briefing the prime minister when I was sitting in his waiting room.

"I got delayed because of what the cabinet secretary had to tell me about his visit to the US," says Gujral. "It has been a useful visit. Our relations with

and internationally recognised, is our Number One problem. Both our present Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition who was also our former Prime Minister are women. They may have many serious differences of opinion on various issues. On this particular issue, however, they should have no difference of opinion whatsoever. On the contrary, they should hold exactly identical views without any reservation. But the big question is: will these two leading women of our country ever join hands and willingly take immediate steps to amend the existing provisions which gravely militate against their own gender?

If they do, it would undoubtedly be welcomed by the entire nation and, in particular, by 60 millions of their own gender.

On the other hand, if they don't and which, unfortunately, is more likely, it will only go to show that none of these two leaders of our country has any sincere desire to do anything, however desirable the same may be, which might even distract them from their male counterparts in education and other social and nation-building activities; prevent various social evils, such as repression on women for dowries, multiple marriage, etc., and above all, in making their contributions which they can do much more effectively than their male counterparts towards halting the population boom which, as both nationally

and internationally recognised, is our Number One problem.

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She was pleased to note that now the landlords would be duly recognised by the government, in anticipation of the annual salary. I complimented her on her patience to wait for the car; only she now needed more practice of this austere virtue. She was surprised that cigarette was not taxed, and the FM forgot about the development of the milk industry (I informed her we still cannot make powder milk).

Tourism was being developed, but we do not have the extra money for the trips. She asked about VAT, but I could not explain it to her satisfaction. She would not accept the simile that putting on cosmetics was a sort of value addition: retorting 'Am I a raw material?'. After hearing that how can I continue the commentary?

## Don't Ask Me about the Budget

Chuckles