

Highly Condemnable

There is a brazen-faced devilry of a kind writ large on the blasphemous act of a Zionist clique in Jewish-occupied Palestinian city of Al-Khalil that seems unparalleled in the chronicle of religious outrages even in that volatile tract of the Middle East.

The sensibilities have been hurt on a global scale regardless of whether a country is Muslim or non-Muslim; because there is a spontaneously trenchant disapproval of such communal vitiation in the normal, civilised ethos.

In a unanimous resolution passed by the Jatiya Sangsad on Saturday, the sacrilege has been roundly and forcefully condemned as an expression of our national disgust over it.

No Witch-hunt, Please

Opposition leader Khaleda Zia on Sunday called upon people to be wary of intellectuals allegedly hired by the government who, serving the interest of some foreign nation, issue statements maintaining, for example, that Bangladesh does not need an army.

Begum Zia's labelling some intellectuals whose views irk her as anti-state hired agents of some foreign government is fraught with the danger of initiating an intellectual witch-hunt which must at all cost be resisted at the very outset.

If one expresses a certain opinion about the Army, it is first of all for the leaders of Khaleda Zia's standing to uphold his or her right to do so and then counter it with her own arguments if she finds it unacceptable.

Why not Intervene?

Playing football with the premier sea port of the country has resulted in its becoming dysfunctional again. Only in March, Chittagong port was brought to a standstill by a five-day strike.

A patchwork was flaccidly sewn across the fault line and no sooner had the work resumed gingerly a fresh gradation of troubles began — this time around a tiff over the cargo handling rights between the merchant labourers and coastal hatch-workers.

Again we have had a five-day shutdown and this time around the congestion took on a horrendous magnitude — 46 vessels waiting at the wharves and the outer anchorage with 24 more slated to arrive in the current month, and the container stock-pile exceeding the accommodation capacity by a wide margin.

Wizened by the exacerbated events at the port, we would like to pronounce from the house-top that Chittagong port is far too troubled for jokes such as palliatives and patchwork. It has become a den of entrenched and conflicting interests that are hardly amenable to exhortations striking the thematic chords like 'foreign shippers will turn away from the Ctg Port' or 'continuation of trouble means inviting the private sector to take over,' so beware, etc.

It is time now to emphasise the strategic importance and essential service status of the port for the sake of stabilising its conditions dependably through a governmental assertiveness. Let all the heads be put together for this to happen.

TWO recent news items published in a few dailies show that the top-ranking leaders of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) were divided over the party's policy matters.

The first news item, published in The Daily Star said that a section of the BNP leadership had opposed the idea of enforcing the eight-hour shutdown across the country, while another section strongly demanded the hartal. Both the sections separately put forward their arguments to the party chief Khaleda Zia.

The second news item said that a group of BNP leaders had been dissuading Khaleda Zia to respond to the recent Bangladesh Television invitation to attend a live interview session, while another group persuading her to attend the proposed TV programme.

However, the cynics might interpret the phenomenon as a visible 'conflict' between the BNP policy makers. But we find it to be a sign of healthy political atmosphere, where the party leaders can fearlessly express their views on issues having implications in socio-political and economic life of the citizens.

However, the important questions involved in the present cases are that which group the BNP Chairperson is attaching more importance to and

Khaleda Zia Must Face the Nation

by Nurul Kabir

The exercise introduced by the BTV has been appreciated by many, perhaps because the people have considered the interview to be an effective form of making the top politicians some sort of accountable to the voters.

what kinds of opinions she is entertaining, and on top of all, whether the decisions she is making really benefit the country — even her party.

On the issue of enforcing a country-wide hartal in protest against the 'development-shy, anti-people national budget', the first group of BNP leaders maintained that the party had made a lot of points against the budget during general discussions on it in the Jatiya Sangsad.

The other group, comprising most of those failed to be voted to the present Parliament and a few youngsters known to be privileged in the party, argued that the protests made inside the Sangsad were not adequate. They further argued that if the party failed to call a hartal, people might question the party's love for the common people who are going to be affected by the budget for 1997-98.

forced by the Awami League against the BNP government between 1991 and 1996.

Khaleda Zia eventually went for hartal on the 3rd of July. While doing so, she just forgot what negative interpretations she used to give about hartals when she was in the driving seat of the country.

Before giving in to the arguments of the protagonists of hartal, the BNP Chairperson perhaps did not take into account one important thing: the usual psyche of the politicians failing to win polls.

On the question of the TV invitation for Khaleda Zia to attend an interview session which would be telecast live, the opposition came from the same group that persuaded Khaleda Zia to call hartal.

as soon as possible.

If that is so, the nation perhaps can no more afford to show respect for such anarchic attitudes. Besides, Khaleda Zia needs to understand that those who argue that the innumerable hartals did not make the AL unpopular in the early nineties are wrong.

The party youngsters' unqualified support for the last hartal could possibly be explained by their 'lack of political far-sightedness'. Without questioning their love for the poor, for whom the shutdown is thought to be enforced, we can say that the young politicians perhaps failed to understand that the hartal would further affect the toiling masses, and thus contribute to invite a slide in the party support among the poor.

On the question of the TV invitation for Khaleda Zia to attend an interview session which would be telecast live, the opposition came from the same group that persuaded Khaleda Zia to call hartal.

prove to be counter-productive for the BNP. They expressed apprehension that the TV activities were likely to select a panel of experts strongly biased against the BNP, and they might deliberately ask questions to embarrass Khaleda Zia.

The other group, however, suggested that she should accept the invitation and take the opportunity to inform the people about the 'repressive measures' the government has been taking against its political opponent.

Since the BNP chief is yet to say 'no' to the BTV invitation, it would be an injustice on Khaleda Zia to say right at the moment that she has already given into the ideas of those pleaded for hartal.

However, the TV authorities issued the invitation to Khaleda Zia the day after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had faced questions from a panel of experts and a group of selected audience on June 23 last.

With the Premier facing various questions, some of

them were really hard-hitting, it is only natural that the people have developed an aspiration to see the leader of the opposition also facing questions from, if not same, the similar experts and audience.

The exercise introduced by the BTV has been appreciated by many, perhaps because the people have considered the interview to be an effective form of making the top politicians some sort of accountable to the voters.

While in power, Khaleda Zia had frequently told people that the opposition should have played a constructive role in a parliamentary democracy and needed to be equally accountable for their performances.

On the apprehension of a panel being biased against her party, Khaleda Zia is free to suggest to the BTV authorities about the composition of the panel. Same could be the case with the selection of the 'selected' audience.

But ignoring the interview session is bound to be explained as Khaleda Zia's reluctance ensure her accountability by facing genuine questions, it is, therefore, up to Khaleda Zia whether she would pay heed to the views of her party colleagues who persuade her to call pointless hartals and dissuade her to courageously face questions.

Great Power Transitions of Our Time

Till the transitions both in China and Russia, take a final shape the world would, however, nervously watch the intricate interplay of the conflictual factors of both domestic politics and international safeguards.

HISTORICALLY, the great upheavals of global proportion were caused during the periods of rapid power transitions. Because the power transition often led to pre-emptive strikes by declining power against the rising competitor or aggression by rising power who felt that its place in the global system was lagging behind its total potential.

Wars could result also from security dilemmas between the rising power and counter balancing coalition like those leading up to World War I and to an extent, the Gulf War in 1991. The rise and fall of Napoleonic France as well as Germany's rise before both the world wars catalysed some of the catastrophic wars of modern times.

Today, again there is a similar phenomenon in the international scene with at least two great powers undergoing rapid power transition — one steadily rising and other steeply declining. Indeed, China has risen faster than most people anticipated and the Soviet Union and then Russia has declined further and faster than almost anyone expected.

China's rapid becoming world's second-most powerful nation will be a predominant factor in global politics as the world takes shape in the new millennium. Although China's rise dates back to late '70s when under Deng Xiaoping, its economy opened up and made a giant leap, it was not until early '90s that she started articulating her newly acquired position and exercising her independent choices in world politics.

role at least in Asia.

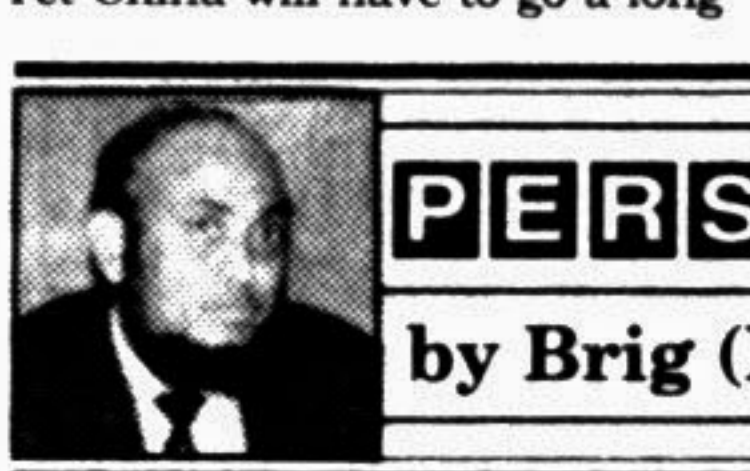
Its obvious goal is to ensure that no country in the region, whether Japan seeking oil exploration right in the East China Sea or Thailand allowing American naval vessels to dock in its ports, will act without taking China's interest in consideration. It seems almost indisputable that within a decade or two China will seek to become paramount power on its side of the Pacific.

Besides, another possible Sino-American rivalry may stem from a new global arrangement in which China with her burgeoning power and prestige can be catapulted to the leadership of a network of states inimical to western objectives and interests. Symptomatic of the trend are China's close military cooperation with Russia, its technological and political help to the Islamic countries in the Middle East and North Africa and its looming influence in East Asia.

China's spectacular economic achievement has already added a fourth pole to the economically bipolar world (the poles being the USA, Europe and Japan) and according to the most forecasts China will be the world's second-largest economy only by the turn of the century. Obviously she is now moving towards a balance it with her military buildup — a key dimension of national power.

China was acquiring airborne early warning technology in Europe and Israel and developing its own inflight refuelling techniques to extend the range of its warplanes.

Now with a deal with Russia, she has acquired two destroyers equipped with modern cruise missile. China has also acquired SU-27 fighter bomber and Russian Kilo class submarines. In recent years, she has built 34 modern warships on its own and developed a fleet of M-9 and M-11 mobile launched missiles. It has expanded its rapid reaction force from 15000 to 200,000. China is, of course, the only Asian nuclear power and has since deployed its nuclear weapons with inter-continental reach.



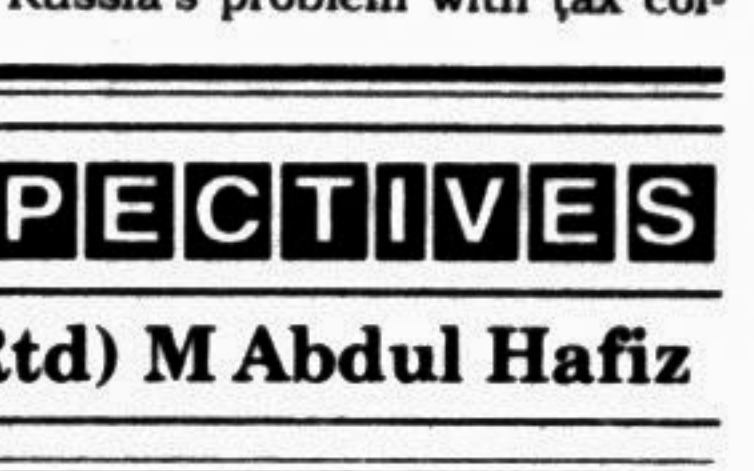
PERSPECTIVES by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

way to acquire the high-tech battle capability as exhibited by the coalition forces in the Gulf War. When China will have that capability which she is determined to acquire, it cannot be without its wide and far-reaching consequences.

This massive military buildup is rendered potentially dangerous when it is to be operated by a government having monopolistic and unlimited hold on power. In its entire 3000 years of history China has developed no concept of a limited government, protection of individual right and independence for judiciary and media.

Because no nation with its status quo disturbed by China's expanding sphere of control would voluntarily abdicate its status.

Almost corresponding to China's rise there has been a precipitation of power in Russia, till recently a super-power. A truncated Russia's precise problem is that of one caught between his lofty ambitions and reduced capabilities. Many Russians cannot conceive of abandoning their country's tradition as a great power while its shrinking power may not allow it to be so far long.



lection already running behind anticipated revenues. Borrowing abroad is likely to remain a feature of Russian economy for decades. Only natural resources — particularly the energy — will remain the foothold for Russia's place in world economy, but Russia hardly affords the heavy capital investments to explore this sector.

Russian military is in a doldrum and there are few signs of its immediate recovery. Russia still remains a pre-eminent nuclear power but Soviet Union's ability to project great conventional power is in ruin. Whether measured by quantitative standards like the number of formations, tanks, fighter aircraft or warships at sea or such qualitative factors as morale and fighting spirit the military is in crisis. At places its personnel receives no salary for months. It lacks adequate housing, heating, clothing and rations. As a result, the Russian military at the moment is a demoralised and ineffective fighting force.

diseases and corruptions are rampant throughout the Army. Sustenance of nuclear force that gives Russia its international standing consumes the lion's share of defence budget and little is left for desperately needed training and equipment.

Compounding Russia's economic and military decline is the political confusion and fragmentation that has overtaken the country. Although a communist return has been averted through Yeltsin's reelection it has in no way solved the state's basic weaknesses — particularly the erosion of a central authority. In the absence of effective Central Coordination, individual ministers make their own policy. So much so that the minister for atomic energy secures contracts with Iran and China and announces the need for new smaller atomic weapons. Even the decisions regarding military intervention or sales of advanced weapons seem to be lying with the provinces, the Cabinet officers, local Commanders or factory managers.

Russia's problems are still deeper. The future of its democratic reforms and economic rehabilitation is uncertain. All through its history as a great country, Russia never experimented with democracy. The country which is to become a modern nation state cannot be expected to turn overnight into a democratic polity after centuries of monarchic rule and Communist monarchical dictatorship. The goals for economic reforms remain unattainable in Russia, basically an inward looking state. In last six years the only phenomenon that has grown in Russia is its illusory hopes of maintaining Russia's place in the world as a country to be reckoned with.

increasingly sceptical about a productive partnership with the western countries which no more appear an attractive model if Russia's greatness is to be upheld. If the post-Soviet trust and cooperation between Russia and the West break down, that may portend a period of confrontation taking the shape of a new wave of cold war.

In spite of the developments taking place in both China and Russia there are cautious optimism that none of the paths through which power transitions have historically led to conflict is very probable now. The transitions within China are no doubt ominous and have given rise to occasional tensions, but the 'engagement policy' for China pursued by other great powers — the USA, Europe and Japan — has had several key successes. Chinese behaviour on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and means of their delivery has moderated over the past decade. China is a member of Non-Proliferation Treaty and has also supported comprehensive Test Ban ratification in 1996. In addition, China has participated in a number of multilateral regional dialogues including APEC and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and it has normalised its relations with South Korea and Japan.

Likewise, Russia also was involved in most aspects of the new security architecture emerging in Europe. It is an active participant in the OSCE, it has signed an ambitious partnership agreement with the EU and it has also joined the Partnership for Peace. In addition to these European ties, Russia with US support is becoming more deeply involved in the G-7 process and moving closer to membership in the World Trade Organisation. The engagement policies, pursued by the West is based on the recognition that China and Russia will remain important players in the world politics and that the prospects for international security can be brighter only with their cooperation. Still the ultimate success in this regard is contingent more on domestic political developments in the states with the potential to disrupt any international mechanisms of peace and security. Till the transitions both in China and Russia, which may take indefinitely long time in the case of Russia, take a final shape the world would however nervously watch the intricate interplay of the conflictual factors of both domestic politics and international safeguards.

To the Editor

Sign of transparency Sir, Very recently, the AL government has completed its one year of incumbency. To observe this anniversary the PM has made her special attendance in a question and answer show of BTV which has also been participated by persons from almost all significant walks of life.

VIP cows Sir, One hundred and fifty cows imported by a private dairy firm from Australia were flown to the Zia International Airport recently. Luckily I was present there and was very surprised to see that some officials were in a big hurry when they landed and photographers from some national dailies were so eager to get their picture!

Undoubtedly such attitude of the PM is highly admirable, because this concept of transparency reflects her democratic view which is badly needed for bringing up a fledgling democracy like ours. I, therefore, thank our PM as a member of student society for her such liberal political attitude which would strengthen the now-prevailing propitious environment of republican politics and hope that such kind of very attractive as well as constructive programme will be continued by BTV at least twice or thrice a year.

Dealing with politics Sir, In the editorial page of May on two issues it is difficult to concur: the first editorial on spoiling the public servants; and the opinion on a political summit of Hasina and Khaleda. The editorial should have pointed out the notorious and damaging role of then opposition party in 1994-95 to lure the civil servants to sell their neutrality for 'a pot of rice'. This damage appears to be irreparable, and will haunt the country

for long. The question is how to extract suitable compensation from the parties responsible for this stigma perpetuated on the image of the public servants. 'Summits' follow the triangle concept: go up from the base upwards, layer by layer, and distill the agenda for the summit meeting. The foundation has to be laid first. It is not a contest of TV tamasha.

Prejudice or phobia? Sir, There exists a close relation between various Islamic practices and the lunar calendar. All the Islamic schedules are subject to lunar calendar. As ours is a country of the second largest Muslim population, most of our holidays are ascertained by the lunar calendar. As regards Dhaka University, the offices remain closed for 38 days in a year. Out of these 38 holidays, total 25 days are determined by lunar calendar when the remaining 8 days, and 5 days are fixed by the English and Bangla calendars respectively.

latest developments in agricultural research, extension and other related disciplines. M Zahidul Haque Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207

BAl, Dhaka Sir, The Bangladesh Agricultural Institute (BAI), Dhaka has been offering 4-year BSc Agriculture degree course since long. It is the sincere endeavour of the academicians at BAI to produce highly skilled and qualified agri-graduates. In order to strengthen our efforts and endeavour, we would like to request all the agriculture-related departments/organisations of the government as well as the private sector to please send information/copies of their latest findings/publications to BAI and other three agri-colleges so that we can let our students know and learn about the

Achieving development Sir, I congratulate the present government and the persons concerned for playing a pioneering role by arranging 'Deshbashi Mukhomukhi', a BTV programme in which the PM was asked different questions by the civic society.

Indeed this was a new step in the history of democracy in Bangladesh, which started its renewed journey in 1991. It seems that democracy of this country is getting more and more fair look day by day. Though the standard of our democracy is far below than that of our neighbouring countries like India or Sri Lanka, yet it gives us some sense of pride that we are no longer going backwards by army coups and vote rigging. We are on the way to ensure transparency and accountability in the functioning of the government which is the first and foremost condi-

tion for achieving development. Md Ziaul Alam (Chishty) 74, East Rajabazar Dhaka-1215

"Dahagram: A New Life"

Sir, I quote the following from the above-mentioned feature published in The Daily Star of 29.6.97. "No mention was made of Bangladesh's flag to fly at Dahagram nor of BDR presence in the enclave. Why the Bangladesh Government at the time mutely agreed to all the clauses without exerting any of its rights remains an unanswered question."

If the writers are aware of the events related to Dahagram they should, for honesty, also try to know why the following questions have remained unanswered. 1. Why did it take 18 years to get the limited right to move in and out of Dahagram? 2. Why Berubari was handed over to India before taking possession of the Tin Bigha Corridor? Bashir Baset Zobeda Villa, Katalgarj, Chittagong