

For a Time-bound Solution

A lot of hot air has been blown over the issue of selection of sites for public meetings to be held away from the streets. Both the political behemoths in a fit of self-righteousness and political gamesmanship refused to be pinned down on a definitive course of action to end their stand-off.

However, the government party should now cash in on the BNP request routed through the President lately that the Mayor's decision banning street rallies in the city be kept on hold till 'a consensus' is reached on the issue. This BNP stance is worthy of support provided, of course, the party binds itself to a full and unambiguous commitment to a definitive and time-bound settlement of the question and then goes on board right-away for an immediate dialogue to start with the ruling party.

The onus lies with the BNP leaders to prove before the public that they are not really eyeing for any political mileage over their opponent Awami League on a question they had themselves addressed when in power. The BNP needs to furnish its list of alternative venues in order that the government party can be engaged in a meaningful and productive dialogue.

The BNP has made it clear that they would be only responsive to a presidential initiative for resolving the question. They have not sent representatives to any of the meetings convened by the Mayor. That should not amount to rejecting a ruling party overture for talks when this is made to wrap up the matter.

While the prospects for the revered President's good offices or intercession in the matter are welcomed by us in unmistakable terms, the level at which the talks should be held is of secondary consideration to us when the need is so pressing to get it over with. The central necessity here is that the dialogue be held at the earliest with a declared intent on both sides to reach unanimity on the selected sites, in at best one to two weeks' time.

Why This Levy?

In the daily glut of news on repression of women, the one that has taken people aback is this week's report of an alleged rape of a woman, of all places in the ante-room to the DC's office in Pabna.

It has been reported that the DC only passed orders of transfer for the two culprits — his 'Nazir' and the accomplice driver. Why? Is rape such a venial crime? It does not matter that the DC was informed of the incident pretty late. He should have taken the initiative to start a criminal case against the two culprit the moment he came to the know of the offence.

Rape is one of the heinous crimes conceivable. By taking a departmental move which smacks of fickle-mindedness compared to the enormity of the crime, the government official has done a travesty of justice.

Reportedly a two-member enquiry committee has been formed. We urge the committee to pursue the truth in the most forthright manner. Knowing the levity authorities have shown it might need to neutralise efforts to manipulate the course and objective of the fact-finding mission.

The authorities should deem this case with extra care and sensitivity because in effect it is the government which is exposed to blame due to the behavioural aberration of two of its employees. Unless it emerges convincingly from the whole ordeal, this incident would only act as a morale booster for the rapists around the country.

We are alarmed that despite increased awareness on this issue, incidents of rape and repression are on the course of a steady rise. We feel a lot is yet left to be desired on the part of male consciousness and sensitivity in this country when it comes to the trauma and suffering associated with cases of violation of women. It is about time the authorities did something exemplary to instill prohibitory fear in the minds of would-be violators of women.

The Algerian Taliban Way

Thirty persons were killed in two terrorist attacks in Algeria last week. In one of these 11 women school teachers were slain in a school not far from Algiers, the capital. They were all slain in front of the students of their girls' school. The militant Islamist group who have been staging regular massacres around the capital since the annulment of an election showing trends in their favour, has been blamed by authorities for the horrid crime.

Algeria has been bleeding for about half a century. First it was the very particularly bloody anti-colonial war of liberation against the French. After the French left an internecine fight among the heroes of that glorious war ensued between Ben Bella, Bel Kacem Krim and Hour Boumediene. For some years now the fight is on between Islamist extremists and the largely westernised liberals of the middle class, educated and secularist. The Islamists evidently want sharia rule but cannot get their way to power both for the advanced classes and specially for the army. Frustrated, they have taken to killing civilians living in areas close to the capital and not subscribing to their jihad. They have so far proven generally devoid of human attributes of understanding and gentleness. They know they are waging a war and there is nothing foul in that. What about things that go against Islam? The woman teachers were slain for no more than the crime of going out to do a gainful job and the job again being unforgivably sinful — educating women! One will not be wrong to call them the Algerian Taliban.

We have here in Bangladesh our home supply of Taliban. A goodly supply and gaining steadily in organisation and number, arsenal and indoctrination. In the AL-BNP tussle this danger is being overlooked to the peril of us all, this society, this state, this ancient humanist culture of ours.

China Revisited: Some Reflections

A MIDST 4000 years of vicissitudes, upheavals, and social changes the flame of civilisation in China continues to burn with incandescent brightness. China is an immensely civilised country and that person must indeed be rare who does not entertain a modicum of admiration for China and the Chinese. This is more true of those who have travelled in that country or lived there for a prolonged period, as I have.

Through the ages China has contributed to the efflorescence of human civilisation. Gunpowder, tea, paper, bureaucracy — those things and much more constitute China's gift to the human kind. Only since the 16th century China was perceived to be lagging behind the western world. During the age of imperialism China had to undergo no inconsiderable humiliation. But the tide of history has brought to our age a new wonder the potentials of China as we enter a new millennium.

Last year, after a gap of twelve years, I visited China for two delightful and memorable weeks. The trip began with Beijing, once so intensely familiar, but with the passage of time now altered almost beyond recognition. Only at the city's nerve centre, the Tiananmen Square, was I able to feel the touch of the days bygone. There were the same vast space, broad street, the focal point of China's heartbeat the Great Hall of the People the balcony from which Mao Zedong proclaimed the birth of the people's Republic of China, on October 1, 1949 and his ever present portrait approvingly, as it were, reviewing China's march with the passage of time, as he once did the parades of the People's Liberation Army.

However all around, the inexorable forces of change are progressively altering the ambience. Though just as in the past, the Square remains crowded, no longer is there the dull uniformity of unisex blue coats and trousers for men and women, nor is there the eternal procession of cyclists, normally interrupted by a motor vehicle or two. These have been replaced by a vast variety in which colours abound and by a vast spectrum of vehicles, produced in China: Santana, Xiali, Cherokee and Red Flag. Cycles are of course still there, but somewhere in the background, and their number getting fewer as the time passes. Queried as to why there were so few motorcycles in Beijing our guide responded, "One can of course buy motorcycles in Beijing but licenses are issued sparingly here in consonance with traffic policies of the capital city; hence the absence of the polluting presence of this vehicle. This was the wisdom of the State strategy, Chinese-style."

The Chinese, whether old acquaintances or strangers, today speak quite openly. The restraint of the past no longer hampers the frankness. There was a time when it was impossible to discern facts about China and the views of the Chinese, individual or collective. I had first gone to China in 1962 as a Pakistani diplomat. My stint lasted three years. So much were we in ignorance of the real state of China that we were hardly aware the between 1959 and 1961, thousands of Chinese had perished in hunger. The world came to know about the extent of the famine, when in the '80s certain demographic statistics, that had formed the basis of the report, were published. When I left China in 1965, neither I nor any of my diplomatic colleagues were able to detect the footprints of the impending Cultural Revolution. When I went back to Beijing in 1970 as a Director for China at the Islamabad Foreign Ministry, I was accompanied by Pakistan's President General Yahya Khan. One year after the visit, we were through Henry Kissinger's tome that came to learn that the Chinese had then taken Yahya Khan into confidence about their opening up of relations with the United States!

Today, the Chinese feel free to communicate. Zhang Ruo Li, our guide during the recent China visit, formed us with the slightest hesitation that she and her Hydraulic Engineer husband, earned roughly the equivalent of 15,000 Bangladeshi Taka per month. She said that within the next decade the salaries of public sector, for otherwise it would be impossible to maintain quality in government service, as capable people would then prefer to the non-government sector. She, her husband and my children in China-boy, or girl, one is enough) have bought a small apartment of 500 sq ft for Tk 200,000. They have no right to sell this, however, for, for that privilege they would have to pay much more. They do not own a vehicle and find the public transport system expensive and cumbersome. In Beijing, a city of 11 million, vehicles number 1 million, out of which 100,000 are privately owned. The number of the latter is increasing everyday. It costs about Taka 20,000 to obtain a television set though even an LCD connection can actually be set up in one day. The family owns a coloured television set, priced at Tk. 15,000. The cost of utilities is minimal. Food is still cheap; beef at Taka 50 per kilo, chicken at Taka 65, fish and dried fish readily available and inexpensive and, she thought that as a Muslim the information was not relevant to me personally. Pork and ham, the most inexpensive of all! All this information obtained in a casual conversation would have been impossible to come by with any degree of certainty in the olden days of my stay in that country.

The majority Han Chinese are conscious about the food habits of Muslims, as China has considerable Muslim population. The prestigious Xiyuan hotel in China has its 19th floor earmarked as the 'Muslim floor' and we were regaled to have our meals at the Muslim restaurant with its cuisine of *polao, kebabs* and *handloom* — all very porkless. We were not encouraged to eat in the nearby Szechuan restaurant with its mouth-watering hot and sweet-sour menu as its porklessness could not be guaranteed! However, the food was delicious in the Muslim restaurant and we hoped that our Hindu companion Tarunkanti Das, an employee of the Bangladesh High Commission did not find this insistence on utter porklessness unpalatable! Happily, but for pork, Islam is quite liberal as to the permissibility of victuals. Consequently, we were able to savour exotic delicacies like braised fish, peas, and tongues of duck, baked pigeons, camel hoofs and sweet Sago with large sized 'Lychees'!

But it is not possible to focus only on its cuisine in China! There is so much else! The new China has traversed a decade in a year and a century in a decade. It is today a nation inspired. It contains one-fifth of the total global population. Nowhere in no period in history has such a vast multitude broken through the barriers of such abject poverty in so short a time. In the next millennium China's economy will be as developed as Japan's, though China is vastly populous, larger, and also a nuclear power. It is a country destined to play a major role in the global arena in the next century.

The Managing Director of the People's Bank of China that we visited, Jing Xu Ching, informed us that in a space of only three years inflation in China has been reduced from 21.7 per cent to 2 per cent. "There is a moderate tightening of credit. Earlier we used to control demand," he said, "now we manage supply". The percentage of the unemployed in China is 4 to 5 per cent and there is no migration of labour from the rural to the urban areas, as the price of agricultural commodities is rising and new industries in the countryside provide ample employment opportunities. There appeared to be a stamp of self-confidence prevailing throughout China's banking system.

A visit to the Chinese International Trust and Investment Corporation (CITIC) was equally interesting. Its senior executive Yao Jin Rong, who speaks excellent English, told us that the guiding spirit behind the establishment of this Public Corporation was the personal initiative of Deng Xiaoping himself. From a modest beginning of a capital outlay of half a million yuan (one yuan approximately equals five Taka) and 16 employees, this Corporation today has an asset of 200 billion yuan and 60,000 employees. The corporation raised money by selling bonds internationally and now owns two banks, a Leasing company and a Securities House. Its international interest today spreads across a very broad spectrum of sectors including Energy, Tourism, Communications and Leisure Industry. It has shares in Cathay Pacific and Dragon Airlines and has invested in far-flung places like Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Chile.

We also met with the former Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh, Chen Song Lu. He is now the Chairman of the Pacific Economic Corporation Council which is headquartered in Beijing. It has in its membership 22 countries of the Asia-Pacific Region spreading from Australia to Mexico. Its function is to enhance economic cooperation among those countries. Here, one was able to detect China's ingenuity in tempering their policies with pragmatism. This relates to Taiwan, whose presence as a member of this forum was an economic imperative. However, since China regards Taiwan as an integral part of the mainland, it accords the island, however, some thought-provoking discussions on economic issues — specifically focusing on trade, exports and growth — took place in the country on the occasion of UNCTAD Secretary General Rubens Ricupero's recent visit to Dhaka.

Much of the discussions, however, were centered around a paper prepared by the Ministry of Commerce. Titled as 'Integrated Country Programme for Strengthening Supply Capacity for Exporting Goods and Services: Bangladesh, 1997-2000', this paper was aimed at development and diversification of the export sector and capacity building for improve governance in trade and trade-related areas. Besides committing the government to involve all concerned stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of trade-related issues, this paper sought 'substantially enhanced technical cooperation' from the donor agencies to respond to the exacting demands of the rapidly changing global trading environment.

There is nothing wrong with its goals and objectives. Every knowledgeable person knows that the country's export base is very narrow — limited to two to three major items and diverse. The nation is a key to sustain in a fiercely competitive export-oriented world of today. Also, there is nothing to dispute with the other objective of the paper — improved governance in trade and trade-related areas — as long such governing is aimed at supplementing, rather than supplanting, the private sector. The recent GSP-bungling involving the garments sector, among others, reminds everybody how badly the government needs 'improved governance' in the trade sector.

The ultimate success of the programme — in terms of achieving diversification of export base and putting in place an improved governance mechanism with technical cooperation from the donor agencies — remains a matter of future. In the meantime, however, several points deserve close attention of all concerned. First of all, the close-note paper of the ministry appears to be an inadequately thought-out, poorly designed and badly delivered government document.

It received very poor marks from the international guests, private sector representatives and other participants that took part in the discussions. Most participants, including the officials representing donor agencies, publicly criticised it as a 'vague and unspecified' document, that lacked appropriate vision or direction as well as specific programmes to boost exports and integrate the country into the global economic processes in the post-Uruguay Round world. Moreover, as pointed out by fellow columnist Kabir U Ahmed on Sunday last, the paper contained some factual and conceptual errors concerning assigned roles of some leading institutions involved in the country's exports and trade.

Nobody would know it better than the Ministry of Commerce itself as to why it had to play before an international gathering such a half-cooked policy report. One would expect that the ministry would submit a thoroughly revised and fine-tuned report to UNCTAD as soon as possible before the meeting in Geneva, the central question being: 'What remains — if the ministry is able to come up with a well-thought-out, specifically focused report, why then it settled for less at the first instance?' Is the ministry ill-equipped to steer the wheel of export-led economic growth through the maze of complex international trade regimes?

The report mentions the challenges of globalisation and liberalisation, ushered in by multilateral trade negotiations under the Uruguay Round Agreements. But it does so in the broadest possible terms, without relating those to Bangladesh context, and without articulating how donor agencies could help the government and the private sector to face those challenges in order to boost the national economy.

China has made great strides in poverty alleviation. In 1979, 250 million people, who at that time constituted more than one-third of China's population, lived below the poverty line. In today's China of over a billion people, only 58 million people's lives can be termed as poor. Doubtless there still persists poverty in China but it is fast receding confronting the stride of rapid prosperity. This tide flows in varying degrees in different parts, and in terms of progress the coastal areas are forging ahead much faster than the regions of the interior. The disparities of income is, therefore, so widening. There has been a marked increase in corruption in society. It is also true that crime rates have increased. Yet it is a axiomatic fact that leaving aside the US and Japan, China today is the third-largest economy in the world, where poverty is beating a hasty retreat.

Problems and issues remain in China. Only 7 per cent of the lands of this vast country is arable, 6 per cent of its population occupy 60 per cent of its land. These are mostly ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet. So, there exists socio-economic problems and the great need for family planning. Hence China's policy of the single child. This means there is a growing future generation in that country who will have none to call 'brother' or 'sister'. This will be a novel experience in the annals of humankind.

Behind this fast progress in China, there is, of course, their embrace of the market-mechanisms, investments from the active Chinese diaspora as well as from foreign investors, in the society and an entrepreneurial spirit in the society. The economy was devastated during the Mao era is erroneous. While there may have been policy mistakes, the overall picture is that the infrastructural framework supporting contemporary China was created during those eventful years.

First, there were the land reforms. In 1949, following the liberation struggle, China, for the first time in 4000 years, broke the shackles of the repressive feudal system of land ownership. Secondly, those years launched significant programmes of human resources development, particularly in the field of education and public health.

Thirdly, Communist rule had relieved the nation of blind prejudices. The society was thus able to acquire an objective power of judgement in a prejudice-ridden emotion-oriented milieu. Fourthly, different segments of the society were able to develop healthy respect for one another. This helped the creation of a healthy and respectable city in China. The foundation of the 'second revolution' of Deng Xiaoping of the late 70s, was thus laid by the first generation of Chinese leaders like Mao Zedong and Zhou En Lai during the aftermath of the 'first revolution'. From 1949 onwards, despite many vicissitudes, China has held fast to its course of development because of its steadfast pursuit of a well-identified goal.

Today, in the Chinese society there is a power of objective assessment that has created a series of options between the acceptable 'good' and the 'bad'. So there is no end to the analysis of the mistakes of both Mao and Deng. While they fear the totalitarian intolerance of the past, they also fear the political chaos of an entirely 'free' society. Hence there is the perceptible hesitation of political freedom keeping pace with market-oriented economic policies. The peaceful changes in top leadership have imbued the populace with a new confidence. Today, the thoughts and images of Mao are not pervasive, in fact, the 'Red Guard' movement of the Cultural Revolution at the Tiananmen Square. Also, there are no likenesses or statues of Deng Xiaoping visible anywhere. Both have taken their places in the minds and hearts of the people of China, where they will be forever securely installed. Mao Zedong, the founder, and Deng Xiaoping the builder of New China.

Boosting Exports Requires More Than Seeking Perks and Powers

DELIBERATIONS on biting economic issues are increasingly being pushed to back burner, as political turmoil — portrayed by indiscreet harlots and often intimidating political clashes among major political forces — takes tortuous shape in the country once again. In the midst of all these frustrations and distracting discussions on economic issues — specifically focusing on trade, exports and growth — took place in the country on the occasion of UNCTAD Secretary General Rubens Ricupero's recent visit to Dhaka.

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Problems and issues remain in China. Only 7 per cent of the lands of this vast country is arable, 6 per cent of its population occupy 60 per cent of its land. These are mostly ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet. So, there exists socio-economic problems and the great need for family planning. Hence China's policy of the single child. This means there is a growing future generation in that country who will have none to call 'brother' or 'sister'. This will be a novel experience in the annals of humankind.

Behind this fast progress in China, there is, of course, their embrace of the market-mechanisms, investments from the active Chinese diaspora as well as from foreign investors, in the society and an entrepreneurial spirit in the society. The economy was devastated during the Mao era is erroneous. While there may have been policy mistakes, the overall picture is that the infrastructural framework supporting contemporary China was created during those eventful years.

First, there were the land reforms. In 1949, following the liberation struggle, China, for the first time in 4000 years, broke the shackles of the repressive feudal system of land ownership. Secondly, those years launched significant programmes of human resources development, particularly in the field of education and public health.

Thirdly, Communist rule had relieved the nation of blind prejudices. The society was thus able to acquire an objective power of judgement in a prejudice-ridden emotion-oriented milieu. Fourthly, different segments of the society were able to develop healthy respect for one another. This helped the creation of a healthy and respectable city in China. The foundation of the 'second revolution' of Deng Xiaoping of the late 70s, was thus laid by the first generation of Chinese leaders like Mao Zedong and Zhou En Lai during the aftermath of the 'first revolution'. From 1949 onwards, despite many vicissitudes, China has held fast to its course of development because of its steadfast pursuit of a well-identified goal.

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tion's export income and economic growth. Nothing less than that could be a satisfactory work from the officials who are supposed to guide the nation in this complex field.

Perhaps, time has come for the nation to rethink the whole thing. At least signs of fatigue in the ranks and files of bureaucracy in confronting the challenge of contemporary international trade are increasingly becoming distinct and transparent. To keep pace with market-oriented trade are increasingly becoming distinct and transparent. The old style bureaucracy is increasingly failing to keep pace with market-oriented economy, export-led economic growth, globalisation of markets, and business-oriented skills and capabilities. The more they are asked to operate in public, the more their inadequacies, inefficiencies and redundancies are being exposed.

While international technical assistance for creating core capacities in the areas of trade-related policy-making, research and analysis may be encouraged, the government should really stress on building a core unit in the Ministry of Commerce, which would understand the challenges of the post-Uruguay Round world trade and help the nation to put in place a viable export-regime to succeed in global hot waters. Otherwise, the existing bureaucracy would continue to come up with ill-designed strategies, badly-cooked policy-reports, and poorly thought-out programmes.

The nation paid dearly for such inefficiencies and inadequacies — year after year, decade after decade. It simply can't afford any more — appropriate manpower must be in place to reap benefits from the rapidly changing global trading environment. Perhaps, a drastic overhaul of the country's trade and commerce bureaucracy could be an essential pre-requisite to foster export-led economic growth. Among others, the nation can consider the following steps.

First, strengthen the International Trade Cell in the Ministry of Commerce by putting together at least one dozen very competent civil servants taken from the whole bureaucracy. These officials, being highly educated and motivated, and having international exposures and relevant training, would be capable of handling complex international trade issues in close cooperation with the private sector.

Second, put the Export Promotion Bureau under the leadership of a politically appointed individual — preferably at the rank of states minister — as done in the case of Privatisation Board. What Kazi Zafarullah already did in less than six months far exceeds what his predecessor's programme achieved in six years before his bureaucratic leadership. Similar momentum can be instilled in the country's export arena with the appointment of a dynamic private sector personality as the chief of EPB. Government, for example, can ask personalities like FBCCI chief Yusuf Abdullah Haroon or his successor Mahabubur Rahman, or former adviser to caretaker government Manzoor Elahi to take over the country's export business.

Third, stop appointing government servants as Trade Representative in Geneva or Economic Minister/Commercial Attache in the embassies. These officers have nothing at stake when the nation signs a bad deal, obtains a bad bargain, or simply lose out in international competition. Appoint competent private sector individuals in these positions with specific assignments for a specific period — in three to four years. This kind of system will instill a sense of responsibility, accountability and transparency in the arena of economic diplomacy at the embassy level.

Implementation of such measures will undoubtedly revolutionise the country's international trade domain. Besides contributing immensely in boosting exports, propelling economic growth and putting the economic diplomacy in proper perspective, such measures will most surely transfigure the badly-shaken image of the nation abroad. Of course, such a programme will face tremendous resistance from bureaucracy. Whether the government will demonstrate the courage to do what is good for the nation — instead of what is good for the bureaucracy alone — needs to be seen.



Frankly Speaking...

by Faruq Choudhury



about Hong Kong's present and optimistic about its future. Macao is scheduled to return to China from Portuguese control in 1999. The Chinese leadership are confident that sometime there would also be a peaceful reunification of Taiwan with the motherland. If 'one-country-two-system' works in the case of Hong Kong, why should it not also be the case vis-a-vis Taiwan? They believe that a positive attitude supportive of the reunion would also evolve among the Taiwanese. To them Taiwan is an integral part of China and no third country should 'poke its nose' into China's internal affairs.

Despite his many other preoccupations our Ambassador, Mustafizur Rahman, new Foreign Secretary, was present in several of these occasions, and he and his wife Soraya, did not lag behind in their hospitality for which I am proud to see they had carved out for themselves a place in Chinese hearts. We were provided with an evidence for this at a splendid evening at their Embassy Residence.

In the whirlwind two-week tour of China, we covered Lanzhou, capital of Gansu province in the north-west and Dunhuang on the outskirts of the Gobi desert on the historic silk route through which had travelled to the Subcontinent, in the fifth and seventh centuries respectively, the Chronicles Fa Xien and Xuan Zang. Next on our itinerary was the ancient Xianyang in the Shaanxi province of Central China and the 'development wonder' of our age, Guangzhou and Zhuhai of the Guangdong province. Finally we took a boat to the recently returned prodigal son of the Chinese motherland, Hong Kong. Through our travels we had traversed the length of ancient caves, seen historic palaces, walls and tunnels, industries, manor-houses, homes and shopping centres, mountains and deserts, rolling hills and spreading plains, spent our time with the young and old, and drawn in our minds a deep and lasting impression of the ever-changing vistas of contemporary China.

China has made great strides in poverty alleviation. In 1979, 250 million people, who at that time constituted more than one-third of China's population, lived below the poverty line. In today's China of over a billion people, only 58 million people's lives can be termed as poor. Doubtless there still persists poverty in China but it is fast receding confronting the stride of rapid prosperity. This tide flows in varying degrees in different parts, and in terms of progress the coastal areas are forging ahead much faster than the regions of the interior. The disparities of income is, therefore, so widening. There has been a marked increase in corruption in society. It is also true that crime rates have increased. Yet it is a axiomatic fact that leaving aside the US and Japan, China today is the third-largest economy in the world, where poverty is beating a hasty retreat.

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First, there were the land reforms. In 1949, following the liberation struggle, China, for the first time in 4000 years, broke the shackles of the repressive feudal system of land ownership. Secondly, those years launched significant programmes of human resources development, particularly in the field of education and public health.

Thirdly, Communist rule had relieved the nation of blind prejudices. The society was thus able to acquire an objective power of judgement in a prejudice-ridden emotion-oriented milieu. Fourthly, different segments of the society were able to develop healthy respect for one another. This helped the creation of a healthy and respectable city in China. The foundation of the 'second revolution' of Deng Xiaoping of the late 70s, was thus laid by the first generation of Chinese leaders like Mao Zedong and Zhou En Lai during the aftermath of the 'first revolution'. From 1949 onwards, despite many vicissitudes, China has held fast to its course of development because of its steadfast pursuit of a well-identified goal.

Today, in the Chinese society there is a power of objective assessment that has created a series of options between the acceptable 'good' and the 'bad'. So there is no end to the analysis of the mistakes of both Mao and Deng. While they fear the totalitarian intolerance of the past, they also fear the political chaos of an entirely 'free' society. Hence there is the perceptible hesitation of political freedom keeping pace with market-oriented economic policies. The peaceful changes in top leadership have imbued the populace with a new confidence. Today, the thoughts and images of Mao are not pervasive, in fact, the 'Red Guard' movement of the Cultural Revolution at the Tiananmen Square. Also, there are no likenesses or statues of Deng Xiaoping visible anywhere. Both have taken their places in the minds and hearts of the people of China, where they will be forever securely installed. Mao Zedong, the founder, and Deng Xiaoping the builder of New China.

The Grameen disappointment

Sir, When the Grameen Bank made the announcement that they are collaborating with some foreign technical group to start a cellular telephone system, we all welcomed the news. There was a sigh of relief because telecommunication has become a very important factor in our lives. We all know the appalling state our telecommunication is in Bangladesh. Moreover we were happy that they would break the monopoly of a certain company in the mobile communications. We were enthusiastic because news of the common people will be able to afford the technology of communication, which was so far in the domain of very well off. The most encouraging of all was that the prestigious organisation like 'Grameen' was going to be involved with it, nobody gave a second thought of the other (technical) partner. As soon as Grameen Phone was marketed it captured it and in a very short time the subscriptions has reached an unprecedented level.

Unfortunately we the users have been very disappointed. They have failed miserably. As customers, we feel cheated. As a believer of the 'Grameen Philosophy' and an ardent follower of the eminent Professor Mohammed Yunus we are in shell shock. The management and the technical side of the Grameen Phone has fumbled and made us all suckers. They seem to be immune to all complaints and criticisms. Their scape-goat is BTB. Well do we need to suffer if the BTB and GP didn't sort their differences before going for public subscription and also why continue selling more telephone connections and that to at cheaper rate when you are unable to service those already connected? This baffles my mind. I am not willing to accept that there is any 'get rich quick' motivation behind this.

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went to the 15th floor and sought meeting with Director (Sales) and Director (Marketing). At the 15th floor, I was told that these directors sit on the 16th floor. When I went to the 16th floor, I was informed that they sit on the 15th floor. So I was made to shuttle like a shuttlecock between 15th and 16th floors. When I spotted one of them at the 15th floor, I was prevented from talking to him by a local aide who quipped that his boss was going out on important work.

After having been left high and dry, I was honoured by being allowed to meet a local employee on that day. This employee sought one more meeting for formalisation of telephone service. This means the subscribers should not expect redress before October 22, 1997 to the least.

In these appalling circumstances, I would request Dr Mohammed Yunus (Pioneer of Grameen projects, an international celebrity, a potential Nobel Prize winner and the pride of Bangladesh) to intervene and help normalise the Grameen Phone service.

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16, Dharmondi R/A
Road No 1, Dhaka-1205

Abysmal debacle

Sir, Bangladesh football team has finished the first SAFF championship securing the last position. When underdog Maldives plays in the final, our team can't manage a single win. Where shall we keep the shame? We have a long years football tradition and professional footballers, but the booters lack in confidence and skill. They have no winning spirit. Strikers can't avail their chance to make a goal. Defenders can't adjust themselves in the crucial times. BFF is nonchalant. The situation is adverse to win a match.

In FIFA ranking we are in 138, India is 120, Nepal 151, Sri Lanka 157, Pakistan 174 and Maldives is in 183. This seems among the participant countries only India is ahead of us. But the result is reverse. What is the obstacle? And how will our team overcome that? This question is for the experts to answer.