

Eid, Pre and Post

This city was pulsating at an immeasurable pace on January 29 night. This was no more the city one has known for all of one's life. A carnival city it was with no shows on. For the people, more women than men, moving about till very late in the night in a situation of everything made immobile except selling and buying, were a show unto themselves. An unprecedented show. It was both elevating and frustrating.

Then Dhaka continued for long three days to be as it never was except for the days of continuous hartals. This was an ideal Dhaka coming into its own. The right population size. The right traffic situation. The right amount of carbon compounds in the air.

No one except the trader-manufacturer seems to have prepared for this great festivals. The traffic-wallahs, no. The water and road transport operators, no. The retail shopkeepers' tale is the weirdest. The bankers' story is hardly any better. The blissful fact that no big accidents took place or any loss of life due to the Eid rush to the shops and to the interior is yet to be reported, doesn't set right the inefficacies and incompetence involved in the breakdown. These only accumulate and some day will take a terrible toll. And this is beside what the pains the pre-Eid collapse of systems caused to the people — the first of which is the unethical price spurt.

The retailers did well to stock even beyond their capacity. Some of these feel that the income from the two Eids can sustain them throughout the rest of the year — in ease and comfort. But where do they sell their wares? In shopping centres which cannot be called either malls or arcades. At Mouchak and Gausia you have four-storied structures rented out to thousands of retailers doing business from cubicles overflowing with merchandise. During the Eid shopping frenzy the structures are mobbed by at least ten thousand buyers at a time. Each breathes in the others' breath. Many fall sick. The structures are not built to take such load and there is hardly any firefighting arrangement. Selected open spaces can be used to hold Eid Bazars by traders of all size.

This three-day breather should be best used by traffic authorities and planners to think up ways of how not to revert the city to the usual traffic anarchy which got absolutely out of control on the eve of the Eid. It boggles the mind to think that a day or two from now the Dhaka sky will again be all lead and carbon. The government of Sheikh Hasina has done next to nothing to lessen their lethal danger. And environment minister Sajeda Chowdhury may exert to cleanse Dhaka atmosphere at least to the Eid holiday level.

Why This War Cry?

The US state department says it is no sabre-rattling. Are we to understand then that it is more serious than that? From what was a veiled threat to Saddam Hussein, contained in US President Bill Clinton's State of the Union address last Wednesday, it is now rumblings of a possible military strike on Iraq that are gaining in audibility throughout the world. The hatch over the vocabulary of Pentagon and the idiom of military analysts we had grown so familiar with more than seven years ago during the Operation Desert Storm is being removed symbolically, if not really as yet.

There is no invaded Kuwait nor a motivational springboard to form a grand alliance to punish an Iraq gone pariah through a total disregard for territorial integrity of a neighbour. Why then is the attempt to recreate the Gulf situation of 1990, even if in part only?

While the US and Britain are apparently moving in on a tough action plan to chasten Saddam for his refusal to let the UN weapons inspection team work at some exclusive places in Iraq, the latter in an updated version of its position has demanded an end to the dominant presence of US and British representatives on the body as compared with those of other nationalities. France, China and Russia are opposed to any reaction overkill in Iraq whose economy is already badly battered to a point of profound humanitarian concern. The scope for pacific UN intervention in the matter has not been exhausted as yet. And this is the option we would like all the world powers to exercise their minds on to avert a new crisis in the multipolar matrix of international relations.

Iraq does not pose any serious security threat to the region, not at least an imminent one, to warrant a superpower military posturing against it. In a bid to destroy the so-called Iraqi potential for a weaponry of mass destruction let's not stimulate fundamentalism in the world.

Newspaper Black-out

For long three days Bangladesh was cut off from the rest of the world. Why, it was cut off from itself. The 72-hour blackout of the fourth estate would inflict a bad injury on a nation that has started converting itself into a caring society of informed people by taking to newspaper reading — but only too slowly. One who can go without a newspaper for three days at a stretch, would soon find that he can do so for thirty days — without much tangible loss to himself. What he wouldn't know is he would gradually cease to be a caring citizen. Collectively, this would spell doom for the nation.

Such long newspaper shutouts are nonexistent elsewhere in the world. For the simple reason that no nation can afford this. The services of radio and television cannot quite make up for the absence of the newspaper. Even in societies where television has become a mania of the masses, newspapers, because of their unique and distinctive role, tend to rise in overall circulation.

How can we reduce this press holiday? The newspapers themselves can, of course, bring out issues of a reduced size on even all three days of the Eid closure. The problem is with the distribution system. The hawkers almost wholly belong to the villages, as do even some of the agents. The hawker associations go into vacation. So? We are confident newspaper managements can take care of this too — for limited circulations.

We urge upon the BSP and hawker samities to appreciate the national interest, as also very solidly interest of the readers, involved in this holiday question and take measures to shorten this long absence of newspapers.

A High Point of Jiang's Brinkmanship

At the end of 9-day visit, the Chinese President was visibly elated because Mr Jiang got all he wanted. He won a useful nuclear deal, rested an assurance of Taiwan and remained uncompromising on human rights.

Assisted measures designed to pressurise her or interfere in its internal affairs, she however placed great emphasis on economic and technological cooperation with the developed world. President Jiang, therefore, faced the difficult task of striking a balance between the two i.e. maintaining and expanding economic links with the US and standing up to Washington's political pressures and Mr Jiang did it with great skill during his US visit.

Jiang undertook his visit to the US only after his policies were reinforced by the decision of the 15 party Congress. Earlier, he consolidated his own position in domestic politics having few rivals to his authority. Even during the period of the enfeeblement of Deng Xiaoping, he wielded power in formulating national policies which increasingly bore the stamp of his authority in spite of the country's paramount leader, still having pulse.

Known to be a master manipulator in politics Mr Jiang Zemin who rose from Shanghai's mayoral office to the Presidency of China had now demonstrated that he was also in control of the country's foreign relations and adroitly used his state visit to the US not only to create an impact abroad, especially in the western countries, but also to strengthen his position at home. After the visit was over, there seemed to be a consensus on the point that for Mr Jiang — who, besides being head of Chinese state is also the General Secretary of China's Communist Party and Chairman of Military Control Commission — the visit was a personal triumph as much as it was also for China.

The remarkable feature of Jiang's visit was that while creating maximum goodwill at

bilateral level and stressing the value of joint endeavours or strengthen international peace and security, China's sensitive core interests were fully safeguarded. Although Jiang made no major concession — not even on nuclear cooperation with other countries — he managed to persuade his host to lift the ban on the sale of nuclear technology to China which had hamstrung economic ties between the two countries for long years. During the visit President Jiang virtually ignored protests and demonstrations organised by the interested groups on issues such as Tibet or human rights but took the opportunity of various func-

encouraging the 'separatists' in the island. At the end, the US promised to show greater respect to Chinese sensitivity about Taiwan. Whatever the stated positions and posturing, the fact remains that the two countries basically agreed to disagree on Taiwan.

On Tibet, President Jiang was absolutely firm. He referred to the abolition of slavery in the US which was likened by him to the abolition of the traditional system of serfdom in Tibet. In this connection he upheld China's historical right and principles of territorial integrity, which according to him, could not be compromised. Although Mr Clinton did raise the

wrong side of the history on human right practices. Mr Jiang rather contradicted the US President by declaring in his speech at Harvard that China's approach to democracy and human rights was in accordance with the 'current of history', although later referring to Tainanmen episode he admitted of probable 'shortcomings' in Chinese way of work. Dashing the hopes of the Americans that before arriving in Washington Chinese President would make symbolic gesture on human rights by releasing the leading dissident, nothing of the kind happened.

Nevertheless, the main content of the current Sino-American relationship being economic there is a measure of success on both sides. An element of complementary in the economies of the both helped developing mutually beneficial trade relation between them with the US becoming the largest trading partner of China. However, Chinese exports expanded much faster and the adverse trade balance against the US has grown to \$44bn, second only to deficit with Japan. This is one of the reasons why the US could be so easily persuaded to lift the ban on the transfer of nuclear technology to China. Because the deal is expected to bring in its wake a wind fall of sales worth massive \$60bn for American companies.

In addition, an agreement worth \$3bn was signed for the purchase of Boeing airliners which would prove a boon for America's troubled aero-space industry. True, the deals are extremely lucrative to the US business but then China has also become the net importer of oil and needs enormous energy for its developments which can be boosted by the transfer of so-

phisticated US nuclear technology to China. At the end of 9-day visit, the Chinese President was visibly elated because Mr Jiang got all he wanted. He won a useful nuclear deal, rested an assurance of Taiwan and remained uncompromising on human rights. Even if the US politicians were sullen on China's human right records, the business community was happy.

Jiang's achievement did not cost him much. China had, however, to commit itself to adhere to existing international restrictions on transfer of nuclear and missile technology. But China had not to pledge to discontinue ongoing nuclear cooperation with Iran and Pakistan; neither the US held out any assurance on giving China the MFN status in trade and other economic matters. It is significant that China and the US have agreed to let the market forces have the upper hand and determine the pattern of ties between them. While the US companies are eager to have an access to the huge market of 1.1bn consumers, Beijing certainly needs capital investment and assistance from America if Jiang has to make good on his promises he made to the 15 Communist Congress to reform the public sector which could cause a third of the 100m state-enterprise workers to lose their jobs.

A Clinton-Jiang meeting during the visit termed a 'Water-shed Summit' by the New York Times has certainly stopped the precipitation in Sino-American relations after the cold war. It goes to the credit of both Presidents Clinton and Jiang that a confrontational relationship that was shaping up between the two transpacific powers could be turned into one of strategic partnership. It is, however, another matter that the growing power of China as well as overlapping interests of the both, especially in the Pacific, would inevitably bring them in clash with each other in the long run.



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

tions and interviews to effectively defend and project China's position as well as to advance the interests of China.

On Taiwan, a prickly issue in Sino-American relations, Mr Jiang did not compromise on China's goal of reunification. On the other hand, China expected 'greater discipline' in America's implementation of the 'One China' policy that underpins three major communiques over the years on Sino-American relations. On his part, President Clinton reaffirmed America's commitment to 'One China' policy but hoped that the people of China and Taiwan would reunite only peacefully. Mr Jiang, however, refused to rule out the use of force. He also objected to the US policy of providing military and political support to Taiwan

issue of human rights several times during the visit presumably to mollify the critics of his China policy he seemed to have nothing to mention after the Chinese leader's statement that by suppressing 1959 Tibetan revolt China had emancipated the Tibetan people from slavery of the ages.

Undeterred by the protests and demonstration by human right activists who dogged him everywhere during the visit Mr Jiang remained steadfast on his own arguments on the issue that its concept was relative to each society and that for China order and stability were more important. The Chinese President remained unmoved even when Mr Clinton was blunt at the extraordinary joint press conference at the White House in saying that China was on the

Massacre in Algeria

by Dr A R Chowdhury

The extent, nature, and brutality of the recent massacres have left even the battle-weary Algerians searching for words to express their dismay and helplessness.

The second round of the election, banning the FIS and arresting its leaders. The FIS took the path of an armed conflict.

The FIS, in its bid to gain power, negotiated with Algeria's other secular parties and agreed to follow democratic principles. In 1995, the parties signed an agreement — the Rome platform — which was eventually rejected by the army-backed government.

The government tried to regain its political legitimacy by holding new elections under restrictive rules. FIS was barred from participating in these elections. Elections were held to elect a new president, legislature and local councils. Despite accusations of massive vote-rigging, a former army general was elected President. The election to the legislature and local councils were dominated by a pro-government party.

Consequently, the violence worsened with blessings from both groups. Each side tried to use the general population in its fight. The government has provided arms to a section of the population hoping to use them in their fight against the members of several splintered Islamic factions. Prominent among them are the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and the Islamic Salvation Army, the armed wing of the FIS. Recent reports have blamed GIA for the indiscriminate massacres of civilians, while the Islamic

Salvation Army is known to have targeted mainly government security forces. On the other hand, government forces do little to protect civilians. In fact, armed government supporters have been blamed for violence linked to robbery, tribal vendettas, and attempts to drive poor peasants off their land.

Many Algerians blame the government for complicity believing that the GIA is infiltrated by government security forces. They conspire to keep terrorism alive in order to reduce the chances of an accommodation by the moderates in the ruling regime with the Islamic parties.

The existence of political violence is not new to the Algerians. After spending more than a century under French occupation, they fought a brutal war of independence. This was followed by a single-party rule for a long time leaving the common mass feeling angry and marginalised. However, the extent, nature, and brutality of the recent massacres have left even the battle-weary Algerians searching for words to express their dismay and helplessness.

The western governments had, so far, ignored the massacre of the civilian population because it never threatened their economic interests. Algeria is a major supplier of gas to southern Europe and its oil and gas fields were not the target of attack. They bolstered the

regime using IMF aid and debt re-scheduling packages, hoping that the government will succeed in ending the killings.

In reality, the government itself has been involved in the cycle of violence. Its willingness to end the violence can be questioned, in particular, following three recent massacres in August and September just outside Algiers. The government army was accused of looking the other way while hundreds of civilians were killed by armed gangs.

It is clear from recent events that the only solution which can bring back peace in Algeria is political. The violence started when a party which, by all accounts, won the election in 1991 was not given the opportunity to form the government.

Despite my personal misgivings about the dogmatic religious message being spread by the FIS, the process of successful democracy requires that every party winning an election should be given the chance to rule. If and when the electorate becomes disillusioned with the workings of the ruling party, they would vote that party out of power. The Algerian electorate were denied the right to choose a government of their liking. The army-backed regime failed to grasp the basic teaching of democracy. The resulting events brought death to many, and misery to the rest.

SLAUGHTER of innocent civilians, especially women and children, cannot be justified under any circumstances. However, that's what is currently happening in Algeria. The savagery displayed in that country beggars the imagination of any decent human being.

More than 2,000 people are estimated to have been killed since the beginning of Ramadan. At least 60,000 have died since 1992. Although last week government casualty count for January put the figures at 27,000 dead and 21,000 injured. The government of President Liamine Zeraoui, a retired general, has sought to play down the casualty numbers in an effort to show that it is still in control of this petroleum-rich nation.

The scale of the massacres and their frequency have finally raised alarm around the world. Human rights organisations are raising questions about the massacres and calling for independent investigations. A delegation from the European Union has just returned from Algeria after a fact-finding mission. They have called for more candor from the Algerian authorities about the violence. The United Nations' commissioner for human rights and the US State Department have also called for an international inquiry to report on extra-judicial executions.

The seeds of the current conflict in Algeria goes back to late 1991 when the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) won the first round of the country's multi-party legislative elections. The army responded by cancelling

honest ones are able to live like an officer and maintain their due standard! So, how can you blame them, after all they would want to look and live like an officer, if that is what they are.

I think probably my brother meant the rich class. That is where he sure is right, for that class certainly has improved and become fabulously rich and more powerful than ever before. No doubt about that. They have made a formidable 'mountain' of money — what with defaulted bank loans and so many other tricks which we ordinary citizens cannot even dream of, let alone commit it! But that is the rule of all Third World countries — the rich will get richer while the poor will get poorer. So why blame the economists? We do wish our economic experts and consultants could help us get out of this vicious cycle. What good are their foreign achieved doctorates and their brilliance if they cannot help their poor countrymen and do something for their country's economy. Or are they also helpless like others in the hands of this system which prevails our country. So unfortunate for us all. When will we ever get out of this system and proceed ahead?

Dr Sabrina Quddus Rashid, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Part-time democracy

Sir, Ours is perhaps part-time democracy. It is that kind of democracy where the voice of the electorate is heard only once in every five years or so, and after the people elect and send their representatives to Parliament the people are nobody. They are expected to stand

more or less quietly on the one side, either nodding their heads in irrelevant and unnecessary approval or growling in frustration. They just look at helplessly while their representatives do all the decision-making. Still they have to bear the brunt of what those elected by them have done during their tenure.

The beginning is good: before being elected to power there are numerous commitments and promises pronounced for the welfare, but afterwards there are problems and excuses which, fulfilling those commitments.

This can be described as part-time democracy. I urge political scientists and parliamentarians for their suggestions on how we can attain full-time democracy.

Abu Mohamed Obaydullah, S-8 Park Plaza Apartment, 31 Banant, Road 17, Dhaka-1213

Not US, please!

Sir, A news item titled 'Involvement of US envoy by BNP shameful' printed in the DS on the 27th of January got my attention. I see nothing shameful if the opposition is trying to patch things up politically using a third, neutral country as the referee. I think this is one of the only constructive acts the opposition has done in a very long time. If we can't solve our problems by ourselves, then why not let others do it? Isn't that the reason why there is an organisation called UN which keeps a look out for prevailing peace?

Unfortunately we always look for others help when we can't control matters ourselves.

Just look back at what took place in 1971. If it wasn't for the help of the Indians we might have still been very much enslaved to the Pakistanis. It is not that Pakistan is tactically and militarily weaker than us, it is simply the geographical location acted against their favour. But my request to the opposition is, it would be better if the mediator is chosen from countries other than the US and UK because at the moment they are playing a highly controversial game with the Islamic nations.

Masroor Ahmed Deepak, Dhaka

Absent from the Mini World Cup?

Sir, The Mini world cup cricket will be held in Dhaka in next October-November. Nine Test-playing countries, will take part in this tournament. It is a matter of our joy and pride that Dhaka will be the venue and Bangladesh will be the host for such a kind of tournament.

But it is a great matter of sorrow that there is no opportunity of Bangladesh to play in this tournament. We see everywhere that the host country takes part in any game. But the mini world cup will be different. I think that the host country should be given an opportunity to participate in this kind of tournament. And if Bangladesh tries her best to get this opportunity, then the authority concerned will consider it. At last I am requesting to the BCB please try its best.

M A Rahman, Dept. of IR, University of Dhaka

OPINION Dare to be Different

A Concerned Observer

Congratulations to the Bangladesh Cricket Board for hosting the Independence Cup tournament in Dhaka. The Board has put Dhaka on the international cricket map — a commendable and timely achievement.

Yet, the way the tournament matches had been scheduled leaves much to be desired. To many cricket lovers and to many who are familiar with the way similar tournaments have in the past been scheduled in other host countries, say, Australia or Sri Lanka, the match fixtures have been a great disappointment. It has perhaps inadvertently neglected the real interest of the host country — Bangladesh.

Being new to the international cricket, the team should have been given at least two more matches by restricting the final match to one and not three. After all, the tournament is to benefit Bangladesh players to get maximum exposure and experience in international first class cricket. That sadly has not been the case. I feel certain that the Bangladesh team has been very disappointed. I pray and hope that as a result the team does not suffer from any inferiority complex on this account even though the management might have unwittingly

overlooked their interest and expectations.

We need not have taken all the trouble and expense of conducting the tournament to have two teams — India and Pakistan play five 'exhibition' matches while the Bangladesh team was left in the cold and had only two matches. Why should Bangladesh choose to conduct what is labelled as the Independence Cup tournament when its own players are given minimum space in the tournament?

Let me be very clear lest I be misunderstood. The question of Bangladesh winning any of the matches had it played few more is not relevant — not yet anyway. It is not even the important thing. To me and to many more, it would have been perfectly proper for the home team to have had more than minimum exposure and get the valuable experience that counts for so much.

Let us not forget that it is in this national interest — in this case exposure to international class cricket — that such ventures are undertaken in the first place. If we do not secure our own interest as the host country, what chances we have of doing that when we play at other venues?

"Sons or Daughters"

Nur Jahan

Dr Sabrina Rashid's opinion published on January 8, 1998 under the heading 'Sons or Daughters' and Mr Masroor Ahmed Deepak's letter regarding this published on January 22, '98 came to my notice.

Dr Sabrina Rashid is quite right in saying that women are more kind hearted than men. The creator made male and female physically different and there are many inherent qualities which the males lack. Women have to bear and rear children — so they are given more feelings and patience so that they would care for their offspring.

A great patience is required to look after young children as they could become very trying. I know about an incident in which a father unable to stand the constant crying of the baby threw him on the floor which resulted in instant death to the baby.

Mr Masroor Ahmed Deepak wrote in one place, 'When women steal they are the smartest and the safest. Because they have loads of places to stash them and know all the tricks in the book so that they avoid getting caught'. This objection is downright objectionable.

Everyone knows how drugs, gold and other stuffs are smuggled by men, capsules of heroin are being swallowed and gold bars are being hidden in the most improbable places.

In another place, Mr Masroor Ahmed Deepak wrote, 'Neither a boy nor a girl is either a saint or devil'. But when look at the world, it seems that most of the devilish works are done by men. I have read in the newspapers many times a son killing his father or mother, in our country, but till now I have not heard of a daughter murdering her parents. Does not it signify something?

Dr Sabrina Rashid wrote at one place, 'Even when they are married off, they always see to all the needs of their parents'. But I think that daughters' hearts may ache for their parents but it may not be possible for them in many instances to help as their husbands may not allow them to take all the responsibilities.

So, having sons or daughters for the security of old age may not always be the answer, who knows what is in store in the future — everyone should prudently plan so that old age will not be burdened with unbearable hardship.