

# The Thin Green Line

*Above all, what is required is immediate Local Bodies elections and one central authority for Karachi with all administrative and socio-economic powers concentrated. Unless local leadership is elected by the will of the people at the grassroots level, there is no hope.*

GEN Babar seems to have a born-again reputation in Karachi, many admire him openly, many more surreptitiously. He was derided and reviled when at a very bloody price he brought peace to Karachi and gave Ms Bhutto a tenuous respite to launch desperately needed economic initiatives. Unfortunately she only initiated cosmetic proposals, high on rhetoric, meagre in substance. The root cause of Karachi's problems being economic, this fissure is being exploited for narrow selfish ends, mainly on ethnic basis. A major part of the populace being the Mohajir face acute economic disparity, maybe in lesser quantum than in other parts of the country but in much more concentrated density. The Central District and other areas like Landhi, Korangi, Orangi etc. are at best ghettos. While other communities share similar backward localities deprived of basic socio-economic facilities throughout the country, the maximum square miles of misery are populated by Mohajirs — thus MQM fulfilled the need for raising a voice in protest, formerly Mohajir Qaumi Movement eventually became the Mutahid Qaumi Movement, change of name but no change of character.

In a change of substance and direction insofar as the leader, Altaf Hussain, seems to have made an individual transition from leader in Pakistan to gradually assuming the role of leader of all displaced Indian (and Pakistani Muslim of Mohajir origin) all over the world, particularly in UK, USA and the Middle East. Looking beyond the Pakistan identity is a most dangerous development, a subtle but deliberate cleavage created in the body politic of the Pakistani nation. Whereas the great silent majority of Mohajirs want to live in peace and harmony despite their misery, privation and travails, a vocal militant minority is hell-bent in holding both their own ethnic minority and the entire country hostage, Karachi being the economic jugular vein of Pakistan.

The MQM continues to command adulation and respect amongst the Mohajir supporters. There are reservations about their military. They are also deep schisms with splinter groups like the Haqeeqs and Goga's crowd (BACK) becoming quite potent, not quite the size to counter the mainline MQM but neither insignificant enough to be shrugged off as of only nuisance value. Of deep concern is the fact that a large number of MQM cadres were trained in India as terrorists, it is now an open question which master's voice they now listen to. There

is open-ended danger to the Federation in allowing them to run scot-free, a fact well known to the PML(N) leadership. Yet the PML(N) persistently attempts appeasement to keep the political alliance intact, to keep the Sindh Government nominally a PML(N) one. For the sake of the party politics, the fate of the country has been thrown as a dice into the ring.

The PML(N) should have allowed the party with the maximum MPs in Sindh i.e. the PPP to form a minority Provincial Government. Liaquat Jatoi has been virtually a pawn in MQM hands, checks and balances having failed. It would have been interesting to see how MQM could have reconciled with PPP, the obvious would have been a PPP minority government that would have looked to the Centre (and PML(N) for support to contain the MQM. Now the whole Sindh Assembly seems almost untidily alienated from the PML(N) and the Federal Government over issues like

up at great cost and risk in 1995 were let go wholesale in 1997. These would form the nucleus of any militant activity that would have to be again brought to heel again, at great human cost.

And who will be at the cutting edge of any operation if it is executed?

While Karachi police would certainly be in substantial numbers "the thin green line" would be held by the green uniformed Pakistan Rangers (Sindh). Having borne the brunt of the responsibilities to maintain law and order since the Army withdrew in 1994, their withdrawal would have led to large-scale bloodshed and anarchy in Karachi. In mid-1995 they were sed effectively by Gen Babar. Based on accurate intelligence information and closing down of arms supply routes and cellular-based communication channels, they managed urban peace in Karachi. Having served well, they have been at the receiving end because it now suits PML(N) politics to keep them at

cent civilians are caught in the cauldron making it into the "killing fields of Karachi". The Rangers Command will have to exercise much tighter control. Commanders requires a special courage to deal under one's command who step out of line. Unless this is done, the Command loses out on discipline. Instead of being apologetic, the DG Rangers (Sindh) resorted to brusquely brushing aside my friend's complaint in the face of the glaring truth. This is not Somalia, this is Pakistan, in Karachi we require someone with a reputation of being tough but fair. Other wise the situation is tailor-made for disaster, widespread bloodshed waiting to happen. And will that solve the problems?

So much has been written of so much to do that an entire briefing book would be necessary to accommodate all economic and political initiatives. Suffice that Rs 10,15 billion must be literally thrown at Karachi, all to be spent judiciously on a crash basis in the "deprived" areas, modern schools and colleges, more hospitals, better transportation, enhanced water supply, rehabilitated power lines for constant electricity, police reforms with induction of educated youth with better salary and service conditions, federally provided job opportunities, private sector encouragement, etc. Above all, what is required is immediate Local Bodies elections and one central authority for Karachi with all administrative and socio-economic powers concentrated.

Unless local leadership is elected by the will of the people at the grassroots level, there is no hope. For the moment the Local Bodies formed can function below the District level at the level of sub-division it is necessary to provide the public with the means to control their own destiny or at least have a positive perception about access to their grievances on a day-to-day basis. The metropolitan city of Karachi needs a Lieutenant Governor as City Manager for law and order, management of socio-economic facilities, civic administration, etc. Police action is necessary to control the rampage of criminals, particularly those under one political guise or the other across a broad political spectrum, however before such a peace-enforcing campaign commences the peace gameplan must be in place to reap the benefits of what the LEAs bring to the table, hopefully very much like the environment Gen Babar created for Ms Benazir's PPP in 1995. We must remember the saying, "those who sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind".

## AS I SEE IT

**Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi**

Kalabagh Dam and Governor's Rule. In 1992, the MQM made a strategic decision in not putting up armed resistance to Operation Clean-up, the result was that its militant cadres lived to fight another day. It was not till Gen Babar assumed charge in mid-1995 that the MQM took grievous losses among its militant cadres. This time around the MQM Chief seems ready to give battle, from far away London he has given a stirring battle cry literally "to man the ramparts", to be ready to fight any law enforcement agencies (LEAs) trying to enter "MQM areas". Rumours are rife that a "search and locate" operation for illegal arms and terrorists is imminent. This time it may not be easy and that forcible entry may lead to reaction and thus becoming "search and destroy". It is believed that satellite telephones have been acquired by the recalitrants to provide necessary communications, mainly to avoid being located as was done by the monitoring of mobile cellular telephones. Sophisticated weapons and large quantities of ammunition have also been believed to have been stocked. The intelligence agencies and the LEAs would be particularly frustrated that those terrorists they had hauled

a distance. In the process, they have become frustrated and trigger-happy.

In a horrible incident, trigger-happy Rangers in a passing mobile gunned down the son of a retired cavalry major and a colleague of mine. My Qaimkhan friend's son's only fault was that he was at the wrong place at the wrong time, in a car on the side of the road where they had pulled up to let the Ranger mobile pass on its way to NED University where trouble had erupted during examinations. Having fought two wars gallantly for this country (1965 and 1971), the father may be forgiven for being bitter at his son's grievous injury, another two inches and he would probably have taken up arms against the uniform he once served so well.

Many parents in Karachi have sons who have been thus lost, many innocents among them. If strict fire control cannot be exercised by the officers of a unit, that unit becomes a dangerous commodity, particularly in urban guerrilla warfare. One wrong pressure on the trigger and dozens of innocents can be mowed down. With the situation crumbling into anarchy and a militant few baiting the LEAs, a situation has arisen where inno-

# Voters Revolt in Japan

by Dr A R Chowdhury

*Japan's economic miseries have contributed to Asia's year-long economic downturn. If Hashimoto's successor fails to exercise bold leadership, Japan will continue to remain in the doldrums for a long time to come, constituting a continuing threat to the economic recovery of its' neighbours in Asia.*

VOTERS in Japan have delivered a stunning indictment of Ryutaro Hashimoto's government inflicting the worst defeat on the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in last Sunday's upper-house elections. The LDP's share of the vote fell from 61 out of the 126 seats being contested to just 44. Hashimoto assuming full responsibility for his party's dismal showing, resigned as prime minister. The LDP still has a comfortable majority in the more powerful lower house of parliament and will remain in power.

The devastating defeat in elections for the largely ceremonial upper house will have an immediate adverse effect on policy formation and implementation at a time when Japan needs to undertake drastic reform measures in order to deal with its economic woes. The resulting uncertainty will make the yen and the Nikkei stock index more volatile. Moreover, it will definitely affect LDP's chances in the coming lower-house elections, threatening to dismantle the *de facto* one-party system that has dominated post-war Japanese politics.

The reasons for LDP's defeat is quite obvious. The Japanese voters have taken their revenge on Hashimoto for his dire mismanagement of the economy. He promised more than he could deliver. The election was seen as a virtual referendum on his economic policies. The protest vote can be traced to Hashimoto's inability to articulate a coherent policy to reverse the downward trend in the economy. Rising unemployment, a record level of bankruptcies a banking system burdened by \$ 600 billion of bad debt, have all contributed to an all-time low level of consumer confidence.

Although Hashimoto offered himself as a strong voice for the type of economic and financial reforms essential to turn around the economy it became increasingly clear that he never had his heart in reforms that would undermine the power of the bureaucracy.

Hashimoto's flip-flop a week before the election over whether his new reform did or did not mean permanent tax cuts may well have been the last straw for the voters. The election results are an indication that the voters have become more discerning and sophisticated, finally demanding more than pork-barrel politics.

The LDP has to find a quick replacement for Hashimoto. Failure to do so will create a political vacuum leading to policy paralysis and market turmoil. A power struggle has already started between his few supporters and the more conservative factions that have tried to undermine him during his entire tenure. Given the LDP's majority in the lower house, whoever is chosen to replace Hashimoto as the leader of the party will automatically become the prime minister.

Keizo Obuchi, foreign minister and leader of the largest faction in the LDP, and Seiuro Kajiyama, leader of the anti-Hashimoto faction within the party, have emerged as the most likely candidates to be the next prime minister.

Obuchi is the senior most leader within the party and going by the convention, is most likely to succeed Hashimoto. However, with a reputation for blandness, he lacks the leadership quality necessary to guide Japan through one of the most critical periods in recent decades. He lacks a clear under-

standing of the problems facing the Japanese economy. Many within his own party are openly skeptical of LDP's chances in the coming lower-house elections.

Other possible candidates include former LDP president Yohei Kono, a moderate politician who has edged closer to Kajiyama's group in recent months. Former prime ministers Nakasone and Takeshita are seen as long shots at this time.

What Japan needs now is for a strong opposition party to come forward with a clear-cut plan to put the economy on the right track. Unfortunately, over the last fifty years the country

has failed to develop a vibrant opposition, a necessary ingredient for a successful democracy. The opposition has remained divided and fragmented ranging from the Communist Party on the left to the quasi-religious Komei party on the right. Many of the opposition groups are merely satellites of the LDP and finds it hard to distinguish its' policies from those of the LDP.

Most of Japan's economic problems stem from the collapse of the real-estate market in the early 1980s. For years, Japan's banks and the government sat tight, hoping that the market would revive on its' own. It didn't. The yen was eventually devalued, and several of Japan's neighbours followed a wait-and-see policy.

Now, belatedly, it has announced a plan to cure one of the country's major problems: The \$600 billion in bad loans held by the country's largest banks. The plan, grandly called the "Total Plan" calls for shutting down insolvent banks and turning over the clients to bridge banks, which would keep credit flowing to reliable borrowers. The account of not-so-reliable borrowers would be turned over to collection agencies.

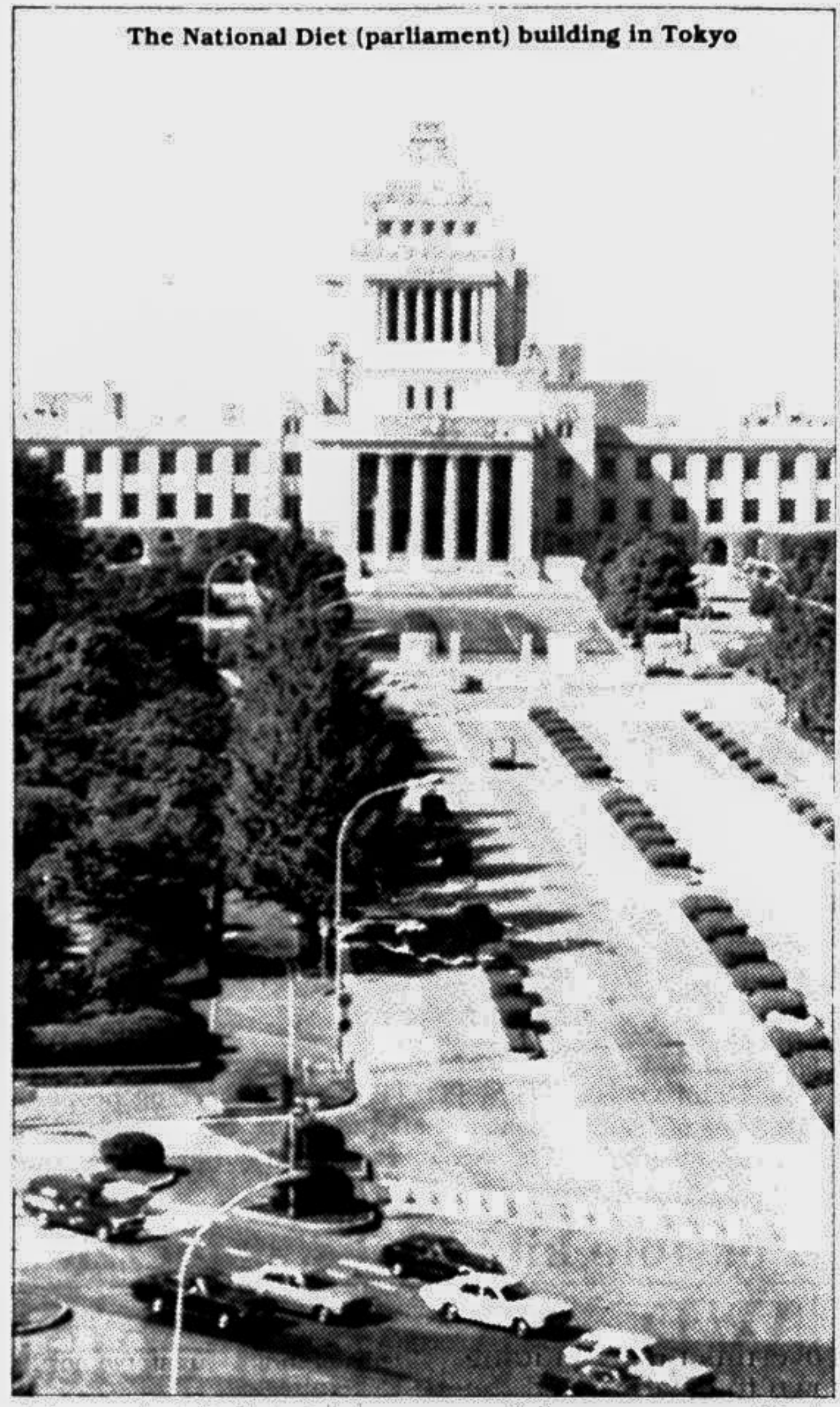
All of this sounds fine, except that Japan has a long and demoralising history of making spectacular announcements and then failing to follow up. The same situation may arise again. The political turmoil resulting from Liberal Democratic losses in the election would definitely complicate the task of translating the grand plan into action.

Bold leadership is essential to economic reform, especially of Japan's financial system. The problem is, Hashimoto's likely successor would be part of a crowd that operates by consensus. Painful sacrifice is foreign to this group. This may create a major problem in the near future.

Failure to win a majority in the upper house could hold up passage of important reform legislation, such as tax reform and banking reform. The LDP will be forced to seek an alliance with some of the small opposition parties to ensure control of the upper house. This would make it harder to formulate a consensus reform package.

Japan's economic miseries have contributed to Asia's year-long economic downturn. If Hashimoto's successor fails to exercise bold leadership, Japan will continue to remain in the doldrums for a long time to come, constituting a continuing threat to the economic recovery of its' neighbours in Asia.

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The National Diet (parliament) building in Tokyo

## National Computer Programming Contest 1998

organised by Proshika in collaboration with The Daily Star  
5th August 1998 Hotel Sheraton Dhaka Bangladesh

## ACM Programming Contest: A Mission for Skill Development

by Prof. Mohammad Kaykobad

each region is organised in several sites. For example, contests in Asian region will be organised in four sites, namely in National Taiwan University, Shanghai University, North South University and Waseda University. This year the contests in these sites will be held on 20, 28, 17 and 23 November respectively.

Europe has five sites, namely Northwestern, covering the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries, UK and other countries in the region, Southwestern, covering Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland, Central, covering Czech, Hungary, Austria, Poland and Slovak, Northeastern, covering Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia, Southeastern, covering Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Moldova, Rumania and Slovenia.

Latin America has 4 sites: one in Central America and 3 in South America. Whereas North America has as many as 10 sites: Pacific Southwest, ii)

team is given a workstation for the development of codes.

The contest duration varies between 4.5 hours to 5. Number of problems to be solved varies between 6 and 8. The sponsor for the last year and this year is IBM. Programming languages used are Borland Pascal, C, C++, Java has developed Visual Age C/C++. Java for the contest, which were used in the last year's World Finals. Judging is done through PC<sup>2</sup> Software.

Last year from Bangladesh two teams participated in the World Finals: a team from CSE Department, BUET, champions of the regional contest of Asia Site 3 and the hosts North South University.

The contest was held this year at Atlanta, Georgia during 25-28 February with the finals on the last day. It was held in the prestigious Marriott Marquis Hotel. Fifty four teams advanced to the World Finals from a field of 1,250 teams. The Charles University, Prague became champion with The St.

among the teams are made based upon the number of problems solved and the penalty time which is computed as sum of time from the start of the contest required to solve individual problems. Of course there is a penalty of 20 minutes for each wrong submission for an accepted solution.

There were a large number of spectators in the large stadium-like ball room where the contest was held. In order that spectators could enjoy the show there were two electronic scoreboards in the room. There were some computers outside the room which regularly updated the status of teams until the last half-an-hour when there were no more updates in order to keep the thrill alive.

Before the contest on the 27th there was a small practice session to enable the participants be familiar with the environment. Each team was given two tables one hosting the workstation and the other for preparation of solutions to problems. There were several other important functions for the participants like meeting the developers of IBM Deep Blue — a chess program which beat the World Champion in chess. It was ended with a dinner party at Pity Patty Parsh, where the participants exchanged souvenirs. I was fortunate enough to be there as the coach of the BUET team. Zakaria Swapan of Proshika Computer Systems was there to encourage our students to perform well. North South University team was led by Dr. Abul Kalam, Chairman, CSC Department. This was a great event where the most talented students in computing battled for the coveted world title.

The next World Finals will be held in the Technical University of Eindhoven on the 11th of April, 1999 with the event starting on the 8th. Hopefully this time Bangladeshi boys will show a much better performance. There is an indication to this expectation in their glorious performance in the Internet programming contest about which we will write in the next issue.

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# Sino-US Relations Enter a New Phase

by AS M Nurunnabi

SINCE Beijing mowed down the democracy movement in Tiananmen Square nine years ago, American citizens turned their back on a nation they judged morally and politically beyond the pale, and public opinion was slow to recover. But policy-makers couldn't quite do the same, recognising that the US had no option but to deal with China. Its rising power made it a force to be reckoned with, like it or not. And so US President Bill Clinton became the sixth President since Richard Nixon opened the way in 1972, to practice "constructive engagement" with China.

In this behalf, President Clinton dared and dismissed considerable opposition in the US Congress and amongst the leaders of opinion in the American media. Beginning his nine-day trip to China, President Clinton was accorded an extravagant ceremonial welcome at the ancient Chinese capital of Xian on July 25 last. Before he undertook his mission to China, Clinton argued that this was the right way to increase America's impact on human rights situation in China, to build nuclear club solidarity against missile technology and nuclear weapons spread, and to stabilise the shaken capital markets of Asia on which any devaluation of Yuan could have a disastrous effect.

In this context, the facts, however, remained that the natural suspicion and swings in sentiment that have always affected US attitudes towards China were hyper-amplified by a convergence of election-year politics, Republican interparty issues, and a string of unfortunate events, like allegations of illicit Chinese campaign contributions, Indian and Pakistani nuclear blasts and reports of a possible security breach in US satellite sales to China. Many analysts think that no one who knows foreign policy feels the US should turn China into a pariah state, and only a handful called for Clinton to cancel his trip.

In the opinion of many keen observers, China's main sins have been a system that does

not permit any freedoms that might challenge the control of the ruling Communist Party in word or deed and arbitrarily punishes anyone who tries to do so. China's government does not allow freedom of expression or association, peaceful demonstration or independent labour unions, it does employ detention and the denial of due process.

Other points of criticism of China include the following: While the religious right has tarred Beijing with a reputation for wholesale repression, religious freedom is officially guaranteed, and millions of Chinese eagerly embracing Christianity and other faiths can pray at thousands of houses of worship. The freedom is qualified, however, by a requirement that all religious organisations register, so authorities can keep a watchful eye lest activism stray too far.

Persecution of Tibet's Buddhists is another matter. It is not their religion but their nationalism that is worrisome to Beijing, driving the government to clamp harsh controls on the monasteries where the independence drive is strongest. China — and the US — regard Tibet as an integral part of China, giving Clinton the tricky task of pushing to end Buddhist repression without supporting separatism.

US administration officials feel that political slandering over human rights is not helping them in Beijing. They reject the hard-line right's argument that the US should isolate China to get better results, despite the liberals' charge that engagement without human rights content is giving Beijing a free ride.

For most of the past 20 years, China has exported dangerous weapons to countries the US distrusts. Beijing is said to make strategic deals that run against US interests. China has reportedly supplied Pakistan with nuclear reactor, bomb designs and related techniques. And China is also said to have sold nuclear and uranium-enrichment equipment to Iran. However, it has been felt that China's calculus of its interests

has been evolving as it tallies what it must give up to win international acceptance. Lately Beijing has grudgingly but measurably cleaned up its role in this behalf, virtually halting nuclear proliferation and cutting back on missile sales. According to a highly placed US source, China is not now at the top of the list of world proliferators. Beijing has signed or acceded to key control treaties, including the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention.

Clinton has been regularly vilified by a broad spectrum of critics who charge him with selling out American values in the name of trade with China. But the reality is that Chinese government is genuinely worried about competition at a time when massive reform of its moribund state enterprises has been throwing millions out of work, but it is still a locked-down, state-protected economy. However, by dint of insistent negotiating, the US has since 1993 reached 15 trade agreements that have opened China's door somewhat.

In the last 26 years since the Nixon visit, the world has changed. So has China. It has modernised and strengthened its economy, and is today a power to be reckoned with. On the political front also liberalism is taking place slowly but perceptibly, which is a welcome sign. The new political leadership is supportive of openness and is more tolerant of dissenting views of individual citizens than at any time in the past. President Clinton during his tour of China from Xian to Beijing to Sanghai must have noticed this change.

Clinton's visit has achieved fruition in a strategic dialogue and agreement on 47 specific points, including a pact to take down missile-launchers aimed at each other's territory, and an assurance of close cooperation in preventing further currency turmoil in East and Southeast Asia. Sino-US relationship has thus turned over a new leaf. Clinton declared that "a stable, open, prosperous China should

dering its responsibility for a safer world" was good for America and the Chinese President Jiang said the two powers were "partners, not adversaries."

Differences were also toughly argued in public at a joint press conference after a long summit of 16 hours that was broadcast live across China and picked up by the world media. Clinton said his welcome at the state level at the Tiananmen Square evoked the ghosts of tragic suppression of the democracy movement in 1989. Jiang stood up for the action at that time saying without it Chir' would not have attained the stability it enjoys today.

Differences, however, remain over US attempts to persuade China to talk to the Dalai Lama and over WTO membership of China. The summit succeeded in securing Chinese cooperation, nonetheless, to "promote stability and to support policies within Japan that will restore confidence in the economy."

The Sino-US strategic accord, on the other hand, was expressly observed by President Clinton as a "counter weight" to the nuclear weaponisation of India and Pakistan. A joint statement from the summit on South Asia pledged full support to the June 4 communique as endorsed by UN Security Council resolution, calling upon India and Pakistan to immediately and unconditionally adhere to CTBT.

Considering everything, Clinton's visit was a historic one and will hopefully help bring stability in the region. The general perception is that in a subtle rearrangement of its Asian relationship, the US is putting China atop the list ahead of its traditional allies. The world will watch with keen interest how the perceived new relationship between the only superpower of the post-Cold War era and the Asian giant develops in the days ahead.

In the opinion of astute observers, it is not naive but self-interested for the US to use all its clout to make tomorrow's China less of a worry than today's.