

Encore!

The climax of the Wills International Cup tournament may not have been the most exciting in the world, but the sound of the drum beat and cheering from Dhaka's Bangabandhu National Stadium is likely to reverberate around the cricketing world for years to come.

No wonder, the players' appreciation of the crowds knew no bounds. And our admiration for the players of South Africa, West Indies, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, New Zealand, England and Zimbabwe know few limits.

During Sunday's grand finale, as South Africa powered to their biggest tournament win since returning to the international cricket fold in 1990, it became clear that success of the Wills Cup has put Bangladesh firmly on the map.

Now that the curtains have finally come down on the greatest sporting theatre ever staged in Dhaka, the time has come to ponder over the possibilities of encores. The effort that everybody has put in for the success of the Wills Cup should not be seen as an isolated event, nor a on-off endeavour.

A Glimmer, at Last

The rabbits-of-a-warren traffic situation in the metropolis has been such a bristling concern that there is no question of another priority on the civic map competing with it in terms of notoriety.

The persistent gloom over Dhaka city is at last clearing out with Bangladesh Communications Secretary Syed Rezaul Hayat having the signed an agreement with the World Bank in Washington for assistance worth US\$ 27 crore towards a 38-crore US dollar Urban Transportation Project conceived by the Government of Bangladesh.

Let's get a move on this at the earliest.

Mouldering Relics

Historical relics mouldering away in northern districts. A Daily Star headline on Sunday. Nothing could be truer. We, of course, have an archaeological department but more as a legacy of a colonial past than as an expression of love for our past struggles and achievements.

The Daily Star story enumerates dozens of relics. These are all widely known sites. Many of these are already under the care of the department. And still many more remain governmentally unrecognised and thus perfect targets of vandals of the most mindless and greedy kind.

Now what to do with the uncaring attitude to the invaluable monuments that must live to give us an identity? Our society must wake up as a whole to the importance of historical and archeological sites and monuments. Before that happens it is imperative that government leaders sit down with luminaries to devise ways and means to adequately preserve the treasure-trove of our national heritage.

Bangladesh—a Case for a Bipartisan Foreign Policy

Bangladesh is a poor country trying to get on to the fast track of development. Bipartisan stand in our interactions with the outside world will enhance our international credibility and esteem, will facilitate obtaining increased external assistance and investment and thus accelerate the process of our economic development.

LOOKING back at Bangladesh's external behaviour pattern, two periods of our somewhat chequered history stand out. These are the initial years of Bangabandhu's government and the latter part of President Zia's.

From the moment Sheikh Mujib set out on his journey back home 'from darkness to light', on his release from Pakistan's captivity, 'not with', as he put it, 'any rancour in my heart for anyone' (meaning Pakistan) he was able to lay the foundation of Bangladesh's foreign policy with remarkable ease, maturity and foresight.

There were quite a few countries which, for their own reasons, did not wish to see the emergence of a new country in this region. Ethnic states like Bangladesh did not then figure in the political configuration as they do now, what with the breakaway countries from the erstwhile Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and the like.

In the then bipolar world Indo-Soviet support for our cause did not help matters for us in the West either. The policy of the US government bore a 'tilt' towards Pakistan in spite of the support and sympathy our liberation struggle enjoyed among large sections of the informed American public.

Then, as far as the US was concerned, the timing of our liberation struggle was not propitious. President Nixon was then trying to open up with China through the good offices of President Yahya Khan and at that point of time, 'the Bangladesh thing' was a distraction, the US could do without.

Therefore, gaining international acceptance was one of the initial challenges for Bangladesh. The matter assumed considerable urgency as the devastated economy of the country called for immediate interaction with the international community. In this, Bangladesh's experience was very different from what it had undergone as a part of Pakistan, a quarter of a century earlier, when, with the departure of the British, world recognition was automatic.

Within the first few days of his return home from Pakistan, indeed even as he was travelling back home, Sheikh Mujib made moves that established, to a great extent, Bangladesh's credibility as a sovereign country, with policies distinctly of its own. For instance, while in London on his way back from Pakistan, Sheikh Mujib told the British leaders of Bangladesh's intention of joining the Commonwealth. Coming from a country born with the support of the Soviet bloc, this move so soon after its birth, signalled to the West our desire to pursue an independent foreign policy.

Sheikh Mujib most sincerely expressed the gratitude of Bangladesh to India for its invaluable support and assistance in effecting the liberation of Bangladesh and worked towards establishing cordial relations with our immediate

neighbour on the basis of sovereign equality. Yet, he lost no time in telling Pakistan that Bangladesh wished to normalise relations with it. As early as February 1972, during his visit to Calcutta, when the heat of the war could still be felt, Sheikh Mujib launched an appeal for economic cooperation among all the countries of the region for 'the betterment of the lot of our peoples'. 'If we fail to achieve that', he said 'posterity will not forgive us'.

The withdrawal of the Indian troops from Bangladesh in March 1972, to which Sheikh Mujib attached the top most priority in his talks with Indira Gandhi, hastened the pace of recognition by the western countries, including the United States. He paid particular attention to improving bilateral relations with key countries like China, Japan and the oil rich countries of West Asia. Even without China and Saudi Arabia according formal recognition to Bangladesh he established contacts with those countries. Although it is not generally known, China was perhaps the first country outside the sub-continent, to which Bangladesh quietly sent an official level trade delegation in what turned out to be a successful bid to establish trade links.

Relations with the ruling circles of Saudi Arabia were cordial, so much so that country made a substantial financial contribution during the 1974 floods. Bangladesh workers found their way into that country, as well as into other oil rich countries of that region, in reasonably large numbers, to find employment.

During Sheikh Mujib's visit to Japan in 1973, he underlined the importance for Bangladesh, of having a bridge over the river Jamuna. That visit set the tone for the close economic ties that were to develop between Japan and Bangladesh.

During those early days of its existence Bangladesh played an active and constructive role in the multilateral field. Bangabandhu enthusiastically participated in the Commonwealth Heads of Governments' conferences, held in 1973 and 1975, in Ottawa and Kingston respectively. In spite of all his pressing preoccupations at home, in 1974, he made a dramatic dash to Lahore to get Bangladesh admitted into the Organisation of Islamic Conference—a move that set at rest the doubts created by the circumstances of its birth, about the value Bangladesh attached to its overwhelmingly Muslim credentials.

He travelled to Algiers to attend the Nonaligned summit and in September 1974, when with the withdrawal of the Chinese veto, Bangladesh became a member of the UN, he addressed the UN General Assembly in New York and then proceeded to Washington to meet with President Ford. Bangladesh's understanding attitude towards China's policy regarding its emergence had thus paid off.

In the initial months of Bangladesh's existence, Sheikh Mujib, built up, brick by brick, the pattern of Bangladesh's external relationship. His moves were aimed at achieving Bangladesh's two primary foreign policy objectives — one Security and the other Development. It is with this end in view that he assiduously crafted Bangladesh's bilateral, regional and global linkages.

However two internal developments in 1975 sadly intervened to raise doubts about Bangladesh's capacity to perform any more as a democratic entity and as an effective State actor in the Comity of Nations. First, the declaration of Bangladesh as a one party State only brought home to observers the immensity of its internal political problems. Sheikh Mujib's abandonment of the multiparty political system was a desperate attempt to deal with a fast deteriorating internal scenario and not an act of political faith in the newfangled set up that was hastily put up. And this hurt the international credibility of Bangladesh. But what shattered it was his and

the members of his family's brutal assassination and the clear complicity of his successor, in that heinous crime, Bangladesh suddenly slid, as it were, into the middle ages. The bloody acts of violence and conspiracy that were to follow only threw Bangladesh deeper into a quagmire.

After an uncertain period of killings and conspiracies, during which Bangladesh's international stock touched its nadir, General Ziaur Rahman succeeded in controlling the chaos, although all was not well within the cantonments. It never was, during his term of office and he himself were to fall a victim of a conspiracy hatched and brutally executed by some uniformed officers.

In spite of the problems he faced in the home front, President Ziaur Rahman succeeded in carving out an active role for Bangladesh in the international arena. The fact that he was able to hold elections, on the basis of a multi-party system and universal adult franchise enhanced the acceptability of his government. Without bringing about any basic change in the major thrusts of Bangabandhu's foreign policy, President Zia actively pursued objectives as set out in the initial days of Bangladesh, be it in bilateral, regional or multilateral fields.

After a period of initial tension, relations with India improved leading to a watershed agreement of the Ganges. A number of bilateral issues with India did remain to be sorted out, as is not uncommon between two immediate neighbours, but the basis of a satisfactory working relationship was laid. Relations with Bangladesh's other land neighbours, Myanmar improved and regional relationship reached such a degree of normalisation that President Zia was able to renew Bangladesh's call for regional cooperation, this time within the concrete framework of SAARC.

Never before in the turbulent history of this region such a specific initiative for peace and cooperation had been undertaken. President Zia was able to bring Bangladesh's membership of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) into full play and improved our relations with the Islamic countries to the extent that he actively led his good offices to end the Iran-Iraq conflict. Excellent bilateral relations with China deepened in a number of areas.

International faith in Bangladesh was restored and it was elected a member of the Security Council of the United Nations by defeating a powerful contestant like Japan. President Zia visited a number of developed countries seeking investment and the response was positive. For instance the Belgian King visited Bangladesh accompanied by a large businessmen's delegation. But alas, the assassin's bullet struck again and President Zia was killed in Chittagong in May 1981. In spite of the immensity of the tragedy, the fact that the constitution was worked following President Zia's death and the Vice-President took over and held presidential elections, as laid down in it, was reassuring both at home and abroad.

The success that President Zia achieved in re-establishing the good image of Bangladesh abroad was undone, not so much by his tragic assassination, as it was by the military take over of power by General Ershad, from his elected successor. That, sadly, again destroyed the credibility of Bangladesh as a democratic state actor as Bangabandhu's killing had, only a few years earlier. The agony of President

Ershad's regime lasted far too long and, in the process, as a British newspaper bemoaned, we became a nation used to 'living with lies'.

For a long and agonising decade, his autocratic regime with a democratic façade stunted the growth of political institutions, and the country, one dares say, still feels its pinch. As an actor in the bilateral, regional and international field Bangladesh was of course tolerated and dealt with as any independent nation on the global stage would be, but it was hardly taken seriously. Bangladesh did not and indeed could not escape the experience of a country with an autocratic government not having a popular support base. An autocratic ruler, who, for the lack of any accountability, can compromise the nation's interest to secure his own position, fails to achieve any long term good for the country.

Bangladesh, with its geographical location, geo-political situation, burgeoning population, low level of economic development, poverty and lack of natural resources needs to, for its own good, interact actively with the world at large. For this it is essential that it quickly and correctly identifies its national interests and acts vigorously to safeguard and promote those. This is possible only within a democratic framework where issues can be discussed and debated both inside and outside the parliament and where the decision making authority, i. e., the government of the day, enjoys a modicum of

public confidence and support. Even in a society such as ours today where the wherewithal of a democratic society is not ideally present, the government has to act keeping an eye on the demands of the electoral process, and as a result is less likely to jeopardize national interest than would a dictator representing an armed or civilian oligarchy.

Bangladesh has had a democratic infrastructure since 1991, but we have so far miserably failed to create in this country a democratic polity. In spite of this failure on our part, the mere fact that since 1991 we have had representative governments in this country, has helped us enormously in our international dealings. Just to pick up one area, that of our relations with our immediate neighbour India, we have been able to sort out a number of outstanding bilateral problems. The issue of the 'Tin Digha' corridor was resolved during the last BNP government. The present AL government has reached a long term Ganges water sharing agreement and has, by signing the CHT peace treaty, succeeded in bringing back thousands of our tribal refugees who had to flee the country during President Ershad's regime.

Now that we have a democratic set up, we should bring into full play our inherent strength as a nation. The first of these is that we are a compact nation jelled by centuries of common historical experiences culminating in the baptism in fire of a war of liberation. Unlike many countries of our region and beyond, emerging out of colonial yolk, who are still struggling to achieve a sense of nationhood or to create multinational states in their respective geographical boundaries, we are a nation, with a near homogeneous culture, who now happen to have a unique opportunity of creating a modern and progressive state.

Second, ours is a society largely devoid of castes and permanent classes and as such we have a great deal of social mobility conducive to healthy

national telecommunication regulations all over the world.

The users of frequencies such as BTV, BB, BTB, Civil Aviation, Cellular phone companies, satellite transmission users, the armed forces and others are to use the frequencies allocated to them officially (license to operate). Monitoring and prosecution are the responsibility of the official regulatory agency, and not the users, who cannot act as the regulators.

Bangladesh should be having a Frequency Allocation or Wireless Board to look into the routine work at the national level, working outside the control of BTB, a user. (There is also an independent Broadcasting Authority in other countries to control all types of broadcasting including private broadcasts, and issue licenses. Its function is different from that of the wireless board). The Ministry of Communication should be conversant with the rules and regulations, the applications, and the practices.

In view of the recent incident, The Monitoring Cell of the autonomous agency has to be strengthened, with technical guidance from ITU. The users may also assist and cooperate.

A Zabr

Dhaka

like Bangladesh, is likely to reveal an increasing convergence of view, as to what is perceived to be in our national interest. There can of course be disagreement on methods and details but it is hardly likely to be over substance. If that be so, the virtue of our having to develop bipartisan positions on major foreign policy issues should become self-evident.

The behaviour pattern of both our major political parties, while in power, with regard to bilateral, regional and global issues shows a remarkable identity of view. For instance both the parties have sought to resolve out standing issues with India, Timbigha, in case of the BNP and the Ganges-water issue in case of the Awami League through mutual discussions based on same arguments and briefs. The attitude of both the parties towards, be it the trade imbalance with India, economic cooperation, the 'push-in' issue or border smuggling, hardly reveals any serious differences. This holds good for the entire gamut of our bilateral relations with other countries. For instance, both the parties attach a great deal of priority to our burgeoning relations with China. It is no coincidence that China was the first country that both Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina visited after they assumed office as Prime Ministers.

Both the governments attached the same priority to the building of a bridge over the Jamuna river and arranged for and allocated funds on a priority basis. In respect of Bangladesh's role in the regional or global arena, whether it is SAARC or the Commonwealth, the Nonaligned Movement or the Islamic Conference, participation in the UN peace keeping operations or the export of manpower, there is hardly any perceptible difference in the policies of these two parties. There is therefore no reason why the government of the day should not on an agreed basis take a bipartisan stance on various foreign policy issues. For instance, assured bipartisan positions on foreign investment and sectors of the economy like, exploration contracts for gas, oil and other natural resources and power production, will not only reassure the foreign investors but at the same time will also enhance the bargaining power of Bangladesh. The same can be said about our dealings with international financial institutions about financial reforms and structural adjustments.

In the present tense political climate of the country all these may appear to be pipe dreams. Bangladesh has seen time and again that both the parties have in what they perceived as national interest, reconciled their differences on 'internal issues' such as the change from the presidential to the parliamentary form of government and institution of caretaker government to supervise parliamentary elections. Bangladesh is a poor country trying to get on to the fast track of development. Bipartisan stand in our interactions with the outside world will enhance our international credibility and esteem, will facilitate obtaining increased external assistance and investment and thus accelerate the process of our economic development.

OPINION Of Kurds and PKK

Mahmut Kaleli

Since I am a Turkish and a Muslim I felt that it is my duty to clear something about the Kurdish people living in my country and the prevailing terrorism.

As it is known from the print and electronic media, recently the relationship between Turkey and Syria in once again heated up because of terrorism. The Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz gave final warning to Damascus (6.10.1998) to stop their support to PKK.

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was formed by different nationals assumably to split Turkey. As the Turkish officials have several times pointed out, this PKK is supported by some foreign forces mainly Greece and Syria. Though Lebanese Foreign Minister Faris Bouezhad has dismissed, yet Turkish officials say that PKK guerrillas live in northern part of Syria and Bekaa Valley of Lebanon which they consider as their safe havens. When they attack any place they forcibly take some people to join them and be militants like them. This is how they increase in number.

There are lots of Kurdish people living in Turkey as well as in Syria and Iraq. So far it concerns my country we, the Turkish, are having very good relations with the Kurdish. Indeed there is no difference between a Turkish and a Kurdish, both are using the same identity. When the Turkish people led by the great leader Mustafa Kemal Ataturk got independence, they first made constitutional laws, the first of which is that Turkey is a sovereign and undivided country. Each an every individual of the country has the same rights. A Kurdish and a Turkish have the same rights. The former President Turgut Ozal (the 8th President of Turkey) was a Kurdish. What I want to point out is that there is no difference between the Turkish and the Kurdish. As a matter of fact I feel little bit guilty to write separate words like Kurds and Turkish.

It is an irony that all the foreign news agencies including BBC, CNN and Reuters report in such a way that anyone who reads or listens that will think that the Kurdish and the Turk-

The writer is a Turkish student studying at Dhaka University.

To the Editor...

Doesn't make any sense

Sir, As per a decision taken up by the Bangladesh Homeopathy Board, students are to sit for the yearly final examination for the DHMS course in mid-November 1998, after availing themselves of classes for only four months in one session. I am a second-year student of the Bangladesh Homeopathic Medical College, Dhaka. Our class started on the 31st of May, 1998. After attending classes for a period of 2 months and three weeks only, we had to appear in the Test Examination at the end of August, 1998. From the end of August up to the first week of October, we did not have any more classes due to flood and other reasons.

Nevertheless, we had to fill out our examination form for the Board examination within 24th of September. The authority of the college again resumed classes on 7th of October, which is scheduled to continue up to mid-November. Therefore, students are to sit for the final examination after attending classes for a total of four months period. According to the rule of the Homeopathy Board, there should be nine to ten months of classes in one session before the yearly final examination. Instead of following this rule, participation in an

yearly final examination after only four months of classes do not make any sense considering homeopathy as a specialised education of medical therapeutics.

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"Tragic"

Sir, The editorial, "Tragic" of October 24, 1998 was timely. I have no knowledge of the background of this tragic incident. However, I would like to make some comments.

It was rightly pointed out that this case must be followed through. I agree with that. In most cases, there is a collusion between corrupt politicians/strongmen and ignorant religious agents. In this case also one would probably find such an alliance.

It was written: "...a rare demonstration of courage and commitment to love... took insecticide and died in tandem...". Committing suicide is not a sign of courage hence such action should not be praised. Taking any life is a major sin and should be taken as such. It is needed to speak up against ill treatment of women, children and the poor. Dowry system is totally against the

teaching of Islam. In fact, Muslim men are obliged to pay dowry (Mehr).

This is an obligatory (Fard) duty in Islam. So is treating women kindly. The message of Islam is a formula for the liberation of women, in all societies at all times.

The goal of Islamic law is to bring about justice, and honesty in society, modesty, piety and personal accountability. I hope and pray to Allah (Subhana-wa-ta'ala) that the people who use Islamic law to further their personal desire be brought to justice.

Aziz Ul Haq Houston, Texas, USA

Frequency management

Sir, With reference to the press reports on the detection and prosecution of illegal radio wireless transmissions, the usual practice is that in each country the allocation and monitoring of wireless frequencies are carried out by a national autonomous agency, guided by UN international regulations, as agreed upon by the UN member Administrations (including Bangladesh). The ITU is the specialised UN agency dealing with interna-