

Opposition Combines and Lays Tough Demands

by M. M. Rezaul Karim

As for the present political polarisation, one can briefly say that both Awami League and BNP leaders, on a number of occasions in the past, made scathing criticisms of the Jatiya Party and Jamaat leaders. Yet, the same leaders did not hesitate to join hands with the latter to serve their own political goals.

THE principal opposition political parties led by the BNP made separate but simultaneous declarations on the 6th instant, outlining a plan of action with an identical set of demands. These are to be met within a period of one month. If not, they will boycott local body elections and commence an all-out movement to topple the government. The combine included Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and several other right-wing political parties but excluded the left-wing ones.

The 4-point demands included resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner, reorganisation of the Commission itself, issuance of voter identity cards for holding all elections, and release of all political prisoners as well as withdrawal of false cases. The ruling party promptly rejected the demands, stating that they would go ahead with the plan to hold elections to city and municipal corporations as well as to upazila councils. The left parties, who are being courted by both the ruling and the opposition parties, have been critical of the latter's move. The CEC, though ready to resign in national interest, does not find any justification to do so at this stage.

Let us take up the demands at resignation. The issue of resignation of the CEC had once earlier been demanded by the BNP but was not pursued. The present demand was prompted by the opposition assertion that he was ineffective and partisan as was evidenced in the conduct of election to the Pabna-2 parliamentary by-election seat. The allegations included the claim that the Chief Election Commissioner was not able to dissuade the two influential Ministers to dismantle their camps in the constituency for weeks before election, failed to take prompt action on the reports of irregularities and intimidation, and was unable to take effective cognisance of rigging in many centres where BNP candidates were seen to have bagged

incredibly low figure of 3 to 5 per cent votes of the total votes cast for the ruling party's candidate.

The CEC, on the other hand, denied these allegations. But, his moral persuasion and advisory efforts were too weak to move the Ministerial presence from the scene, he had been handicapped by the procedural and regulatory limitations and that the failure of the opposition to provide adequate and timely evidence were among reasons for the opposition not being able to redress some of their grievances. He also claimed that since his assumption of office situation had measurably improved. In the same vein, he reiterated that he would be ready to resign, if and when national interests so warranted. It is, however, evident that whether a person is ineffective or partisan is a matter of opinion and, therefore, is a moot question. The view will depend entirely on the eyes of the beholder. Let us, therefore, proceed.

The CEC is an office of great respect, responsibility and is largely instrumental to ensure democratic process and practice in the country. He should work without fear and favour, since he enjoys constitutional authority and security of office. T.E. Sheshgiri, CECs of some such illustrious CECs have evoked awe, admiration and respect from all by their bold and timely actions on issues, often at variance with respective gov-

ernments' plans and actions.

As our CEC was appointed with the consensus of major political parties, he should stand impartially and morally though not legally, continue to hold office, to be effective and to remain above reproach, as long as he continues to enjoy their confidence. As soon as he loses this confidence, for justifiable reasons or not, moral compunction dictates that he leaves office voluntarily in favour of someone who would enjoy it from major political parties. Legal and even principled are relegated to a secondary role on the issue. Even the postulate that the loser blames the referee for defeat may not hold good in this case. It is the interest of the nation and honour of the individual that need to be vindicated and would override other considerations. And, above all, this will help save the nation from another political catastrophe and will glorify a former civil servant, adverse criticisms against him notwithstanding.

The question of reform and reorganisation of the CEC has now become imperative in order to make this august body really effective by allowing independence of operation by freeing itself from the influence and dictates of the executive. The organisation works under the control of Prime Minister. It must be allowed adequate financial allocation, authority to choose its own personnel and wide scope for independence of action. This is not an unrea-

sonable demand and stems from the democratic urge of having a really workable and impartial electioneering authority.

Thirdly, the demand for introduction of voter identity cards for all local body elections appears to serve interests of all political parties, if they genuinely want free, fair and impartial elections. Voter identity cards will effectively reduce the incidence of casting votes by wrong persons through false identity or impersonation. This will not completely eliminate rigging, but will certainly abate it. No political parties, except those who rest their fortune on the existing method, would, for obvious reasons, make objection to it. Furthermore, any legal coverage to bring all local bodies within the purview of this system will, one assumes, be gladly supported by the opposition.

The other criticisms relate to the practical aspect of the time frame needed for completing such a vast project. The CEC, which had taken up this project in earnest for the past several years, may and should expedite action and proceed on selective priority basis. Meanwhile, some of the forthcoming elections to local bodies may be postponed for a while. Any way, election to these bodies within a definite time framework is neither sacrosanct nor legally imperative.

Finally, comes the question of releasing political detainees and withdrawal of false cases

against political opponents. Never before during the last BNP rule of five years had any Awami League leaders been held in prison, except for a few that too towards the end of the regime but only to be released promptly. The present Awami League government shortly after its inception started arresting former BNP Ministers, some on ridiculous grounds for which the present government had broken all records by paying fine, besides releasing them under court orders.

The incidence of arrests and such cases number thousands. The number is also unprecedented. There was an agreement with the ruling party to examine these cases with a view to releasing them. The lists of cases submitted to the government are still lying unattended. If there is goodwill and real love for democracy, the extensive use of the law enforcement agencies for narrow partisan interests should be shunned and cases of undue detention and victimisation withdrawn. The claim that law takes its own course does no longer hold good. It is the executive which initiates prosecution and apparently decides the strength and weakness of the course, but this must not be done to serve political interests of the government party.

The above is an exercise to establish the fact that the opposition demands, indeed, are not unreasonable and should be fulfilled to serve interests of all political parties. As for the present political polarisation, one can briefly say that both Awami League and BNP leaders, on a number of occasions in the past, made scathing criticisms of the Jatiya Party and Jamaat of the latter to serve their own political goals. Policies were then made subservient to expediency. This merely substantiates the old adage that politics, indeed, makes strange bedfellows.

Office of the Ombudsman A Vehicle to Restore People's Confidence in Government

by Navine Murshid

As is the practice now, a deaf ear is turned to the person with a complaint to lodge. Here, not only is the complainer in a weird position, but the gap between the government and the ordinary people widens. Ultimately the government does not really know what is going on.

THE government has decided to appoint an Ombudsman right here in Bangladesh. Who will be the first Ombudsman is however still undecided. The concept of the Ombudsman is unknown here although it is mentioned in the constitution. As far as implementation goes, ombudsman is just a 'hard word' to be learned. So, what is ombudsman?

The concept of the Ombudsman originates from the Scandinavian experience and is derived from the Swedish word 'ombud' which means a person who acts as a spokesman or representative of another person or persons. It is a public officer entrusted with the power to investigate public grievances. Its supervision covers all central and government agencies and their staff. Their duty is to investigate complaints by citizens who claim to have suffered injustice as a result of maladministration at the hands of government departments.

The institution of the ombudsman is important to provide the Parliament with a means of supervising compliance with laws and ordinances by judges, civil servants and military officers.

According to the Bangladesh constitution the functions of the Ombudsman are as follows: The ombudsman may investigate any action taken by a ministry, a statutory public authority or a public officer in any case where - a) an complaint in respect of such action is made to him by a person - who claims to have sustained injustice in consequence of such action; or who affirms that such action has resulted in favor being unduly shown to a person or in accrual of undue personal benefit or gain to any person. b) Information has been received by him by any person or source, otherwise than on a complaint, that such action is of the nature mentioned in 'a'.

It is not necessary that only

one ombudsman be appointed. There may be more, looking into the different matters for example, the children's ombudsman, ombudsman for the disabled, ombudsman against ethnic discrimination and the like. Bangladesh would, however, start off with one ombudsman looking into all kinds of affairs, although he'll be able to recruit people to assist him. Nevertheless, it can be hoped that Bangladesh will have ombudsmen dealing with problems of all kinds, no matter how trivial in the near future.

In Sweden, the Parliamentary Ombudsman (JO) covers all central and local government agencies and bodies. It is not intended to supervise cabinet ministers or members of the parliament (that is, a special Standing Committee to deal with that). There are four Parliamentary Ombudsmen elected for four-year periods.

Anyone who feels that he or she has been wronged may submit a written complaint to the JO. The parliament has empowered the Ombudsman with full discretion to decide which cases to investigate. The JO concentrates on those that are significant in the sense that they involve striking a just balance between the claims of community and the freedom of the individual. Most of the complaints come from people caught in the vicious circle of bureaucracy. The JO's duty is to inspect from time to time the courts, prisons etc and if necessary to pursue long-term investigations. When the JO finds that an error has been made, but not so serious to entail punitive or disciplinary consequences, the JO may issue critical statements of opinion, containing more or less serious criticisms. One of the duties is also to present an annual report to the parliament which contains an account of the work done and the investigations

carried out. How the ombudsman in Bangladesh will operate is still unknown. If it is shaped along the Swedish lines, it will be welcomed with open arms.

The setting is very nice. Never did the people ever imagine that their voices could be heard. Now that the impossible is about to become the possible, the ever threatening vice of red tapism and bureaucracy could slip in forming a small bureaucracy within a big bureaucracy. This would cause many an eligible ombudsman to be skeptical about agreeing to be the first ombudsman. After all, (s)he would be the trendsetter and others would follow suit. If this is what would happen ultimately, it is quite natural that no one would really want to start something that would finally have an adverse effect on the society as a whole.

This is a very positive step because it will be the first time that the people will be able to raise their voice and be heard as well. People are insecure when they pass the police...even they pose a threat to their well being. The people today need to know that there will be someone to stand by them, to hear them speak out their fears and rectify them where injustice has been done. Therefore, the first task of the ombudsman would be to gain the trust of the people and bring back their confidence in the government.

As is the practice now, a deaf ear is turned to the person with a complaint to lodge. Here, not only is the complainer in a weird position, but the gap between the government and the ordinary people widens. Ultimately the government does not really know what is going on. The people need a platform to talk and the Ombudsman might as well can be that platform where people will be able to say what they want; where it will be the people who rule; where justice may be done.

The Longer the Trial Gets, the Uncertainty would Deepen

The case: presidential impeachment.

The court: the Senate.

The defendant: William Jefferson Clinton, the 42nd president of the United States.

The charges: perjury and obstruction of justice.

The presiding officer: Chief Justice William Rehnquist.

The jurors: the senators.

The prosecutors: House Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde and 12 other Representatives.

by Mir A Zaman

IN the last few months, the Americans and, thanks to BBC, CNN, CNBC and other satellite news channels, people around the world have had the chance to follow the 'historic' (the news channels and the US legislators have a tendency to use the word whenever and wherever possible) developments in and around Capitol Hill, leading to the first presidential impeachment trial since the case of Andrew Johnson in 1868. On January 7, solemn ceremonies - including oath-taking of 100 senators to 'do impartial justice' and the formal reading of impeachment articles by the 13-member House prosecution team - marked the opening of a trial that might lead to removal from office of Clinton.

The senators, unlike the representatives, have from the very onset tried to ensure a bipartisan tone in the proceedings. However, discord at some stage of the proceedings seems highly likely. There were clear signs on the very first day as the senators searched a common ground to keep the trial from dissolving into partisan sniping. No sooner had Clinton been formally made the defendant, dispute over the need for witnesses, which Republicans favoured and Democrats opposed, erupted. The scenario could have turned for the worse, thanks to Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott and his counterpart in the minority ranks Tom Daschle it didn't.

The Republicans had scheduled votes on their proposed ground rules and also on a Democrat alternative, and looked set to win the fight with a 55-45 edge. Lott had other thoughts on his mind. He didn't want the first vote to set a partisan tone and, therefore, pulled back from the brink and kept negotiating. The signal was well received by Daschle and the Senate Democrat Leader proclaimed: "I think there is some common ground."

Then followed an unprecedented two-hour informal closed session of senators from both parties in the Old Senate Chamber on Friday (January 8) and on a unanimous vote all 100 of them approved a bipartisan plan that could allow witnesses and would start opening arguments next week.

"I think today we have acted in the very best tradition of the Senate, and it is an appropriate approach for this historic, very solemn event," Lott was quoted by Reuters as saying after the agreement.

The bipartisan trial plan postpones decisions on calling witnesses until late January and require majority vote to approve them. The House prosecution team of 13 Republican members and the White House each would get 24 hours of floor time, about three days, to present their cases. Senators would get 16 hours for questions. When those are concluded, motions to dismiss the case and to call witnesses could be made -

they would require a majority vote.

The House and the White House would have to recommend a list of witnesses and have three hours each to argue why they should be called.

If the motion to dismiss failed and the list of witnesses was approved, the trial would recess while the witnesses were deposited by each side. A second majority vote would be required after the depositions to determine if any of the witnesses would actually be called to testify.

Each side would get eight hours for closing arguments, and each article of impeachment would be voted on at the conclusion.

Friday's vote effectively ends hopes of a truncated trial, an issue frequently discussed on the lead-up to the Senate session, and the proceedings may now go well into mid-February. More importantly it leaves the matter wide open. Republicans are, perhaps, banking on the uncertainty factor.

As the trial drags on, there is always a possibility of a dramatic decline in Clinton's popularity rating and that would give the Republicans the handle they have been after. According to a USA Today/CNN poll, hours before the impeachment trial began the president's approval rating dropped to 63 per cent, down from a record 73 per cent on December 20. The sudden swing in public opinion would

surely be encouraging for the Republicans, although they care very little about the polls.

American people seem to have developed an aversion towards the proceedings at Capitol Hill and have so far made clear that although they believe that Clinton may have tried to cover up his 'inappropriate affair' with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, his acts do not warrant his removal from office. However, as the recent opinion poll suggests, they may be getting weary of the whole affair and might, at some stage of the trial, feel - well, if Clinton's resignation puts an end to all these, then he should. Luckily for the president, a vast majority believe, despite the Republican resilience towards moral and ethical cleansing of the Oval Office, that their president is doing a swell job.

Democrats, who have been anxious to get over the 'Clinton Crisis', would surely want the general people to stick to this view. A president, who has been elected twice to the White House by popular vote, should not be ousted from office because of an aberration, they have so far claimed. To bolster their arguments they have frequently referred to the opinion polls. Now there is an ebb, they are indeed in a dilemma, which may lead to a few Democrat votes against the president.

Senator Robert C. Byrd, a senior Democrat from West Virginia, has already issued the

first indication that any of the Senate's 45 Democrats may vote for removal of Clinton.

On the final vote on the articles of impeachment, "I could go either way based on the evidence as I've seen it or heard it. And I've followed it pretty closely," he said in an interview on the C-Span cable TV network.

Just after Clinton admitted before the grand jury to the 'inappropriate affair' with Lewinsky in August last year, Democrats started distancing themselves from the president as they felt deceived, if not cheated. Remorseful rhetoric in public bridged that gap and subsequent success in the mid-term elections cemented it. If the fall in popular approval continues, the Democrats may again feel the compulsion to distance themselves from the 'sinner' president. The longer the trial gets the uncertainty over Clinton's presidency would deepen.

When the presentation begins this Thursday, the Democrats would surely hope that the White House defence team presents a strong case so that the senators vote against a full-blown trial and resort to a censure motion, instead. Otherwise, although 67 votes for removal of Clinton from office now appears unlikely, who knows, in a matter of few weeks, the equation may change and the most powerful man on earth, on one fine morning, might find himself unemployed.

Wye River Pact Essential for West Asia Peace

by Jagdish P Sharma

The Oslo deal was forged by an Israeli government far more dovish than the one Netanyahu formed in 1996. But at Wye, Netanyahu signalled he is committed to the Oslo framework. The Palestinian government-in-waiting all but declared war on its hardline opponents, "Your security is our security."

THE post-cold war West Asia seems to be in the grip of dramatic changes. Perhaps no symbolic gesture in recent times has been as pregnant with meaning as US President Bill Clinton's recent call for a new multi-billion dollar international aid package for the Palestinians.

It is a necessary complement to the peace agreement that Clinton helped put together in Maryland this fall. And the diplomatic deal remains significant as it drove home the point that peace can deliver tangible economic and social gains to both Palestinians and Israelis.

The Wye River memorandum agreed after nine days of hectic parleys set out "steps to facilitate implementation" of an agreement on limited Palestinian self-rule which was signed more than three years ago.

It was a major accomplishment for President Clinton written off as an impeachment victim a few weeks ago as the river pact proved to be the biggest foreign policy coup for his administration.

At the Wye conference centre on Maryland's eastern shore, all three main parties crossed important thresholds. Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister had always been sceptical about the 1993 agreement signed in Oslo between Israel and the Palestinians.

The Oslo deal was forged by an Israeli government far more dovish than the one Netanyahu formed in 1996. But at Wye, Netanyahu signalled he is committed to the Oslo framework. The Palestinian government-in-waiting all but declared war on its hardline opponents, "Your security is our security."

Palestinian president Yasser Arafat declared during the White House ceremony that Washington formally becomes the guarantor of security arrangements aimed at breaking a 19-month deadlock over interim Israeli troops withdrawals from the West Bank.

Under the US plan, Israel would turn over an additional 13 per cent of West Bank land of which three per cent would be barred to construction. An additional 14.2 per cent will pass under full Palestinian control. That would bring roughly 40 per cent of the territory under full or partial Palestinian control. President Arafat will also get an economic circulatory system: A two-year-old airport in Gaza will be allowed to open

and Israel will establish two "safe passage" corridors between the West Bank and Gaza.

At the heart of the Wye Agreement is a detailed US "working plan" on terrorism that had been under discussion for nearly a year. Its author, CIA director George Tenet, who with the agency's Tel Aviv station chief had become the *de facto* mediator between the two sides.

As part of the new Middle East profile, the agency will "facilitate the exchange of intelligence between the Palestinian and Israeli" over suspected terrorists and planned terrorist acts.

The talks nearly broke down over security until the Israelis extracted concrete pledges to be carried out in part, with CIA arbitration. Among them - a phased collection of illegal firearms; a reduction of the Palestinian police force - which the Israelis feared was turning into an army - from 43,000 to 30,000.

President Clinton clearly relished his negotiating coup when he expressed to a gathering that the Wye Agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians represented his personal atonement.

Clinton also visited Gaza in mid-December, '98 to address a session of the Palestine National Council convened to strike off all references to the destruction of Israel from the Palestinian national charter.

He is the first sitting US President to visit the Palestinian territory. In this recent visit, the US President also called on Israel and the Palestinians to use "honest discussion" and not violence in dealing with their differences over the Wye land-for-peace deal.

It is indisputable that the latest peace accord between the Israelis and the Palestinians represents a genuine breakthrough. However, it would be wrong to think that the potential of peace has already been realised.

There is even less cause to be optimistic about the developments taking into account the post-accord situation, particularly the toughening of the Israeli stance on applying the agreement and the mirrored Israeli-Palestinian relations.

The Israeli foreign minister, Ariel Sharon, has gone back on draft agreements with the Palestinians concerning the opening of a sea-port in Gaza and a safe passage corridor linking Gaza and the West Bank

both key elements of the Wye land-for-security pact.

Besides, Israeli Prime Minister refused to release Palestinian prisoners accused of attacks on Israel's to meet Israel's obligation under the Wye Accord to free 750 detainees.

The Wye accord also in no way restricts the Israeli construction and expansion of Jewish settlements. The continued Israeli building in Jewish settlements in Arab-Palestinian territories violates all the Arab-Israeli peace accords including the Wye River land-for-security deal.

Israel has authorised the construction of 480 homes in the Jewish settlement of Kochav Yaacov, more than tripling the size of the West Bank enclave.

Palestinian negotiators warned they would suspend the implementation of the Wye Agreement - which requires the Palestinian authority to crack down on armed anti-Israeli militants - unless Israel frees political prisoners and halts settlement building.

"Things are still stalled. There seems to be not much change in Israel's colonial attitude," lamented Khalid El-Sheikh, Palestinian ambassador to India.

The Palestinians have not even succeeded in obtaining a specific assurance on ending the Israeli occupation of Arab-Palestinian territories. The whole transition to autonomy is hedged in with numerous conditions, some of them unequal.

Every since the 1996 election that elevated Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to office, the political scene in West Asia has been overshadowed by his abuse of Israel's commitments under the Oslo Peace accords.

Instead of taking confidence-building measures, Israel is bent on increasing hostility, bitterness and distrust to an independent Palestinian state. The future of West Asia depends on how Israel sheds its Zionist garb of occupation, exploitation, expansion and settlement.

However, it should be remembered that a comprehensive peace settlement ensuring regional stability and security can be achieved only on the basis on UN resolutions 242, 338 and 425 and in accordance with the "land for peace" formula.

— PTI/APB Feature
The writer is an expert on West Asian and North African affairs.

Efforts on for Reconciliation between China and Japan

by ASM Nurunnabi

The high rating of self-image that China has been harbouring for itself seemed to be far from being helpful in generating positive results, as in the case of South Korea. Besides lowering tensions between China and Japan, China might have learnt some lessons from South Korea about improving relations.

AN effort at reconciliation between China and Japan against the background of a bloody history which divided the two nation for a long time, China's President Jiang Zemin made a state visit to Japan lately. The visit began with the Chinese President's address at Japan's Waseda University which was due to confer an honorary doctorate on Jiang. After some initial wranglings with left and right wing students, Jiang did finally make it to the podium to deliver his address. Jiang urged Japan to acknowledge that "its aggression in China" had caused 15 million deaths.

This was how the process of healing and reconciliation between Asia's superpowers made a start. Like Korea and many of the neighbours that Japan overran in World War II, China has remained unmoved by Tokyo's subsequent expressions of "regrets and remorse", everything short of a simple written apology. When Japan finally gave a proper apology to South Korea's President Kim Dae Jung in October last, Jiang's advance men began lobbying for an identical gesture.

Tokyo's diplomats reasoned that while Japan had actually occupied Korea for decades, its troops had merely invaded China during wartime. Jiang left no doubt over the hairsplitting. Japan and China have squabbled since re-establish-

ment of diplomatic relations in 1972. In Tokyo's view, Beijing causes most of the trouble currently reviving wartime memories to bolster the Communist Party legitimacy. There may be, of course, some truth in that. China has maintained a systematic propaganda campaign in schools and television that vilifies Japan's war record and indoctrinates hatred among China's increasingly nationalistic youth. Japan's attitude doesn't help, of course. Not only does Tokyo refuse a written apology but it plays down atrocities like the rape of Nanking, in which 1,40,000 or more were said to have been killed.

Leaving aside Beijing's insistence on war apology, there are some positive aspects of the current deals between China and Japan. During the recent summit, China garnered \$3.2 billion in loans for agricultural and environmental projects. That figure does not include a pledge for billions more to a

Bullet train project linking Beijing and Shanghai, Japan now supplies about 60 per cent of all the development aid that goes to China each year.

Many Japanese are sick of all the Chinese needling. "Japan and China must first move ahead towards the future rather than looking backward and criticising," observed a leading newspaper. Another leading newspaper called for an end to "contrition diplomacy."

Japan's government also does not appear to be in the mood to back down. It may be recalled that US President Bill Clinton had previously pleased the Chinese by publicly endorsing the "Three Nos" in US relations with Taiwan, "not of one China and one Taiwan" and no support for Taiwan's membership in the United Nations or other organisations of sovereign states. Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi refused

to give identical assurance to China. That encouraged Beijing's suspicion that Japan secretly supports independence for Taiwan, which China regards as a renegade province. In addition, Tokyo refuses to shelve its plan to cooperate with the US on a new theatre of missile defense network - a system with the declared intent of shielding Japan from a future North Korean missile threat but equally effective over Taiwan.

China is reportedly miffed at Tokyo's plan to launch four spy satellites to help it peer into Korea, and parts of northern China. There were elements in US policy particularly with reference to Taiwan, which conveyed mixed messages to China. Two years ago, when China was lobbying missiles off the coast of Taiwan to warn it against declaring independence, the US cemented new security ties with Japan. Since then, however, Beijing presented itself as the

rock of regional stability. More than anything else, Jiang's foreign policy overtures seemed intended to buttress the idea that China, and no longer Japan, should play the leading role in Asia. One analyst even remarked: "The perception that Japan and China are trading places in Asia has started to spread."

The high rating of self-image that China has been harbouring for itself seemed to be far from being helpful in generating positive results, as in the case of South Korea. Besides lowering tensions between China and Japan, China might have learnt some lessons from South Korea about improving relations. For example, South Korean President has made improving ties with Tokyo a top priority. First, he invited Emperor Akihito to Korea. Kim also offered to lift a ban on Japanese music, films, and books and to stop browbeating Tokyo over its military past - if only Japan would apologise for the war. It was Tokyo's credit that it had no hesitation in doing so. This scenario, however, didn't happen in the case of China. Speculation was, however, rife about possible repercussions if China had followed South Korea's example. In Beijing, the official Chinese press politely lauded Sino-Japanese friendship. In unofficial quarters also there was no lack of subdued praise.