

An Arranged Game?

The Home Ministry's operations to mop up outlaws and terrorists have been featured by 'raids' on their 'dens' and their surrender induced by an amnesty offer that contained a promise for their rehabilitation. In the case of Khulna the picture is highly confusing sending quite a few wrong signals across. Out of 496 who surrendered before the government 372 have so far been set on bail from Noornagar sub-jail, apparently in pursuit of the amnesty offer. Ideally, amnesty would have meant instant release on satisfaction of a good conduct undertaking given by those who responded to the call. But that could not simply be the approach in the present context because most of the outlaws and terrorists who have turned themselves in are FIR-named accused in murder, rape, robbery and arms cases. The primary motive behind their surrender must have been to get their criminal records white-washed and rehabilitation could very well have been their secondary agenda. For the time being we are concentrating on them leaving out the oft-repeated public apprehensions that many a hardened criminal remains at large, completely untouched by the 'combing operation' of the home ministry.

There can be two assumptions in dealing with the surrendered outlaws and terrorists. First, the government can ill-afford their outright release without making sure that they are not wanted in any serious criminal cases. So, the legal implications will have to be weighed up very carefully there. Secondly, what ought to be no less important is the fact that while the government may be prepared to give them a reprieve the victims of their crimes are not expected to be so.

In practice, however, what the home ministry seems to have done is that they have had the police arrest them under section 54 thereby rendering them bailable while, in point of fact, their criminal records of murder, rape, robbery and dacoity have been skirted. This apparently induced amnesia over their criminal antecedents has been regarded as a 'violation of the criminal penal code' by a lawyer, but the make-believe arrest under section 54 could not have actually erased their substantive criminal records.

Some top terrorists however, while confiding in our reporter who did the story on the subject, said, "Police might arrest us again in case of our refusal to act as hired goons of the ruling party when called for." Such observations might create an impression in the public mind that the surrender was not a spontaneous act, it was more of a simulated thing.

JU's Late Realisation

The tempestuous atmosphere prevailing at the JU campus for quite some days now and the agitations by the general students against the ruling party student wing miscreants, forced the university authorities to call for an emergency meeting of the Syndicate on Saturday. The Syndicate in a U-turn from their previous position decided to file criminal cases against four Student League leaders accused of having raped some women students on the campus nearly a year ago. The Syndicate also decided to ask the law-enforcement agencies to arrest the 13 charge-sheeted accused in the Ananda murder case, the BCL leader who was killed in an intra-party shoot-out almost 19 months ago.

Why has the Syndicate taken such a long time to take these decisions? This is a very pertinent question raised by leaders of the General Students' Unity (GSU) and this paper will also like to ask the same question. The answer to this question supposed to have been given by some Syndicate members sounds ridiculous. The general feeling is that these belated actions give a lie to the university authorities' original plea that criminal proceedings could not be initiated against the rapist students because the victims might not volunteer information for fear of social stigma. A section of the administration has definitely shown their weaknesses for a particular gang of rapists, some of whom were even specially allowed to sit for examinations despite expulsion orders having been issued against them.

Added to this serious problem is the surfacing of the construction contract which the JU authorities are now trying to award to the Army to save their skin. Insiders believe that the JU authorities have, only under the pressure of circumstances, reacted to the manipulation of the tender bids by a particular group of ruling party student organisation. All these factors have made the situation at this premier educational institution untenable taxing on the patience of the innocent general students and non-partisan teachers. We hope the authorities will move quickly and firmly to bring normalcy to the academic atmosphere in this university.

Avoidable Tragedy

Whether occasioned by political feuds or road accidents, unnatural deaths of students in our country more often than not lead to predictable consequences — road blockades and destructive demonstrations perpetrated by class fellows of the victims. The rampage enacted by the Mirpur Bangla College students at the premature death of a sophomore under the wheels of a BRTC bus was, therefore, hardly surprising. Sincere their bereavement must have been and justifiable their anger; however, the means they adopted to ventilate their emotions is, under no circumstances, condonable or acceptable. That their mindless act could have accounted for serious injury, even death, doesn't seem to have bothered them at all. Irrational and deplorable that their actions were we cannot ignore the message they tried to send across: authorities should do something so that a similar tragedy does not occur in future.

Circumstances that led to the death of Nuruzaman Khan Jewel are sadly familiar. On more than one occasion in the past, passengers trying to get into moving buses have ended up under the wheels. Despite having designated stops, drivers of the city-centred bus services in general have a tendency to pull over wherever they deem convenient and the passengers, more or less, pander to their whims, thereby working in tandem to violate extant traffic rules. On the other hand, the law enforcement personnel, for reasons best known to them, turn a blind to such irregularities. Such improper actions often result in traffic congestion, even fatal accidents.

In our view, Nuruzaman's death points at a systemic failure. We are sure that there are rules against 'convenient stop-overs'; however, these are frequently violated and seldom enforced. We would urge the authorities to shore up its enforcement wing and make sure the drivers of the passenger bus services go by the book, especially they should be made more cautious while plying their vehicles near the education institutions.

China's South Asia Policy

Jiang Zemin's even handed dispensation towards India and Pakistan does not affect the friendship between Beijing and Islamabad. Pakistan continues to raise the thorny issue of Kashmir with India as well as in international fora and China having made its point does not react to this.

regional issues. Henceforth her ritualistic support to Pakistan on issues like Kashmir became less frequent and instead, she now resorted to the advocacy of good neighbourliness among the countries of South Asia. During his official South Asian tour in 1996 Jiang Zemin, the Chinese president, while in Pakistan, laid out China's policy towards South Asia. In that he treated South Asia as a single unit and showed no 'tilt' towards China's close friend of four decades. The starkly told his Pakistani hosts that they should set aside the dispute with India to promote cooperation.

What does it mean? Is there a fundamental shift in China's triangular relationship between herself, India and other South Asian countries? Has an overwhelming factor — that of Pakistan — in that relationship ceased to function? Is China no more a countervailing power in South Asia as was thought so long? Not long ago China pursued an independent set of policies with regards to the countries in South Asia. While her diplomatic tie with India remained unbroken, she recently as a result of 1962 Sino-Indian war, China not only fostered friendship with India's enemy, Pakistan, she transferred huge quantity of military hardware to Pakistan and is also believed to have passed technology to her for making nuclear bomb and missiles which all sides of the world are watching with interest. Defying the treaty obligations of Nepal and Bhutan to India, China hobbled with both the strategic Himalayan kingdoms and sup-

ported military hardware including tanks and artillery pieces to Bangladesh. She also frowned at Indian intervention in Sri Lanka and supported its demand that the Indian forces should be expeditiously withdrawn from that country. Are those policies no more functional? Let's dig into the past for an understanding.

When in 1949 the People's Republic of China with its militant brand of communism came into being it was at once faced with a military threat of regime-extirpation from

out to Pakistan hoping her enemy's enemy could be its friend in spite of multiple factors that belied such possibility. Pakistan was not only an ally of the United States and a member of anti-China South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), the country having banned its Communist Party in 1954 was staunchly anti-communist. On the face of it no other two countries could have been more different. So, a Sino-Pakistan friendship could hardly be rationalised.

Yet, by making an apt appli-

national politics. After almost four decades the norms and nuances of that cooperation are now undergoing their painful transformation in a radically changed world. This is what gives rise to misgivings and skepticism in concerned quarters. But the basis of a Sino-South Asia equation perhaps still remains intact although the invocation of China's countries prominent with the passage of time.

The China-Pakistan nexus and for that matter China's policies individually towards South-Asian countries went too strong to be dismantled so easily. In each of these countries including India, China has her stakes which she would like to safeguard. Many aspects of Sino-Pakistan relationship is still a mystery — particularly China's transfer of nuclear weapon technology to Pakistan remains an enigma. Libya's Muammar Gaddafi once offered China \$2 billion in cash for the sample of a nuclear weapon, but China refused. When her ideological friends like Vietnam and North-Korea were threatened by the US and in the case of the former with the threat of the use of nuclear bombs, China again held back and did not give them nuclear weapons or technology. It is not for nothing that she made an exception in the case of Pakistan. It seems to be an oversimplification that the burgeoning power of China's stature having ambitions in Indian Ocean since she has been trying to reach through Myanmar would give up her interest in South Asian countries.

Sino-Pakistan relations seldom generated the sense of sharing a common culture or ideology and were based on values such as friendship, trust, sincerity, respects for each other's view-points despite sharp differences and desire to help out a friend to the extent the circumstances permit. These values are no less potent in sustaining a lasting friendship of the kind that exists between China and Pakistan. Standard norms of international relations may not have a space for such values. They, nevertheless, not only worked but were sufficiently institutionalised in crse of these two Asian states.

As a result, Jiang Zemin's even handed dispensation towards India and Pakistan does not affect the friendship between Beijing and Islamabad. Pakistan continues to raise the thorny issue of Kashmir with India as well as in international fora and China having made its point does not react to this. Pakistan also does not seem to be worried as the Sino-Indian hostilities have been getting muted of late. India is no more nervous over recent negotiation of Bhutan about her border with China, so long India is kept informed according to the spirit of her treaty obligations to India. China's military sales to Pakistan and Bangladesh do not enjoy India's approval but at the same time, are no more considered threatening to her. Notwithstanding progress in Sino-India rapprochement since 1988, India continues to regard China as adversary and a long-term rival. India's neighbours in South Asia look upon China as a benign power, even a friend, with varying degrees of intimacy. It hardly matters if China-South Asia relations keeps shifting within the perimeter of this perception.

PERSPECTIVES by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

none other than the United States. The western-sponsored alliances strategically encircled China to restrict her maneuverability. Her predicaments continued to multiply and she was virtually reduced to a pariah state within a decade. By the late fifties her relations soured with both the Soviet Union and India, with the former terminating its aid to China and latter confronting her militarily over border dispute. By about the same time, Tibet revolted and a fleeing Dalai Lama was sheltered by India. With Moscow moving away from China the latter lost her link also with Eastern Europe. It was at this critical juncture that China desperately reached

against the modern version of Maurya's Bharat Chakra could turn its fond hope of Sino-Pakistan understanding into a reality. The proverbial Chinese wisdom could sense that Pakistan was using her US connection for not achieving anti-communist but anti-Indian ends and its anti-communist is limited to domestic politics only. This belief was reinforced when the Chinese overtures to Pakistan were accepted in good faith. Thus began a friendship and cooperation between the two asymmetric countries that survived many vicissitudes* in regional and international politics and set a perfect paradigm of quid pro quo in interna-

Missile Tension in Asia

The firing of the latest Chinese missile will expectedly encourage India to further develop its missile technology, which in turn will also prompt Pakistan to match Indian actions. In the process South Asia will swing into a new race of improving missile power that may further disturb regional peace and harmony.

"MISSILE tension" in Asia has, of late, acquired a new dimension with China testing a long-range surface-to-surface missile within its border. It will not be an exaggeration to say that it has introduced elements of danger in many Asian countries particularly in the South. China's latest attempt at underlining its nuclear ability has engendered a concern among Asian as well as western countries. The missile, named Dong Feng-31 or DF-31, tested late last month is estimated to be capable of carrying a 700-kilogram nuclear warhead over a range of 8,000 kilometres, meaning thereby even if based in the Chinese territory it can hit targets not only in India but also in the coasts of the United States, Europe and Australia. NATO, for obvious reasons, views the development with a mixture of alarm and interest. Beijing already possesses intermediate range missiles (IRBMs) to threaten Japan, Southeast Asia and the Russian far east. Taiwan being only a hundred miles away is the most vulnerable to short to medium range missiles exercised during the Taiwan Strait crisis in 1996.

The news of the latest missile-testing by China was announced by a single-sentence statement by the national news agency Xinhua. The very timing of the testing when tensions

persist between China and Taiwan suggests that Beijing is trying to send a message across. Since no details of the weapon have been available as such, the firing initially left the world guessing as to what kind of missile was actually tested. There are speculations all around. In the United States analysts are attaching a lot of importance to the test firing while some experts feel that these developments are rather insignificant. But most agree that it is a development that deserves to be taken note of and more so in view of the present situation in Asia, taking into consideration developments in North Korea and the Indo-Pak tension. The four-nation peace talks in Geneva on the 'missile tension' involving primarily North Korea, the exclusive communist nation, did not make any headway, despite proclamations from all sides that they genuinely want progress in the parley. Two Koreas — the North and the South — and their respective Cold War allies — China and the United States — are involved in the negotiation. While rivalries and tensions between the two nations of the Korean peninsula

MATTERS AROUND US Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

certainly form the broad parameters of discussions, the talks particularly centred on North Korea's ambitions to acquire nuclear power and development of the missile technology in the peninsula. Beijing's problems with Taiwan are well known but tension between them has heightened in recent days following a statement by Taiwanese President Lee Teng-Hui underscoring his wishes for 'special state-to-state' relations with China. Beijing considers Taiwan a rebel province and has threatened to use force to stop the nationalist island from declaring formal independence. China had long been denied its just position in the United Nations where the nationalist China occupied the 'China' seat for many years at the behest of the West, which later accepted the realities. Now the West accepts

the 'one China' policy. Bangladesh, which has close ties with China, however, feels otherwise. Incidentally, the latest DF-31 missile testing came at a time when China is involved in two important regional developments — the four-nation 'peace talks' over the North Korean 'missile tension' and the belligerent situation over the Taiwan Straits. Evidently, this new missile will cause fresh thinking in several nations of developing their own missiles that at least matches the Chinese advancement, if not surpasses it. Consequently, the missile technology will receive a further fillip and this means the addition of a new phase to the arms race. The development will have far-reaching effect in South Asia where two principal actors — India and Pakistan — have al-

ways been at the loggerheads. Their conflicts are a matter of common knowledge and New Delhi-Islamabad relations further worsened over the recent Kargil conflict. These two South Asian neighbours in May, last year, detonated several nuclear explosions and have become 'unofficial' members of the elite 'Atomic Club'. India and Pakistan are sparing no efforts to develop their missile technology. Agni I and Agni-II are latest accomplishments for New Delhi. Ghauri and Shaheen for Islamabad. The Chinese test firing of the DF-31 will have an adverse impact on missile technology in South Asia since the development will come in for introspection in the region. For India and China, two Asian giants, it means a lot. Two neigh-

bours have sources of hostilities despite efforts towards normalisation of the ties which had nose-dived in 1962 over a border clash. The irritation centring the land boundary remains and Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes not long ago described Beijing as "number one" enemy for his country. He charged China with designs to browbeat India through missiles and other form of military developments. However, Mr. Fernandes later toned down his allegations and Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh paid a visit to Beijing. But both view each other with a great degree of scepticism and suspicion. The firing of the latest Chinese missile will expectedly encourage India to further develop its missile technology, which in turn will also prompt Pakistan to match Indian actions. In the process South Asia will swing into a new race of improving missile power that may further disturb regional peace and harmony.

OPINION Concern over Power Tariff Abu Imran

Recent news reports say that the government has again raised the power tariff by five paisa per unit with retroactive effect from July 1, 1999. With the above increase, it is becoming easier to lose count of the exact number of times the power and gas rates have been increased during the last three plus years since the present government came to power, let alone the increase on other essentials. With due humility, may I say that the government perhaps has gone berserk and taken to raising prices and taxes on the one hand and making hollow promises to improve the quality of life of the people on the other. It is not understood how the increase in prices and taxes, arbitrary VAT etc. would improve the common men's lot when they are already hard-pressed with highest ever increases in prices of essentials.

also be good for the common masses. Normatively speaking, it is both harsh and unethical to impose taxes on ordinary people by treating ADB salaries as standard income. And as an independent and sovereign nation, it is also disgraceful on the part of Bangladesh to be dictated by an agency's terms and conditions, especially when it goes against the interest of its ordinary citizens.

While re-fixing the power rate (which always means an increase), perhaps the authorities have ignored the fact that since power is the main propelling force of modern economy, an increase in its rate will induce a chain reaction in terms of price-hike of other goods and services. The ultimate burden, in a substantially enlarged form, will fall on the weak shoulders of poor consumers whose income is very unlikely to shoot up overnight and he'd therefore be terribly affected financially. Then, all the soothing, charitable words delivered by the authorities about development, improvement of quality of life, increase in growth rate of 5.2 per cent (since detached) would appear to him farcical and treacherous, signifying nothing but betrayal. It seems that the government has even lost the moral strength to ask others to refrain from activities leading to price-hike let alone keep it stable. Moreover in Bangladesh, the concept of consumerism is almost absent. So there's hardly any one to help the poor in Bangladesh to combat the price-hike.

However, as a last resort, and assuming that there are still people in the government who may be positive in their attitude to help out ordinary people, it's earnestly requested that the responsible authorities kindly review the power tariff and retain the old rate (which is already very high) and take appropriate measures to control the ever-increasing prices. Meanwhile, a DA (dearness allowance) to the extent of 50 per cent over the present allowed both in the government and private sectors so that at least the wage-earners are benefited to that extent. This is the norm in the civilized world and is worth following. Hopefully, the suggestion above will be sympathetically considered in light of the general interest of the people. It may be mentioned that some leading dailies in the editorial have also expressed their concern over the rise in power tariff.

It has become almost a common phenomenon in lower middle class houses to have a row over low income and rising expenditures on essentials. Instead of taking remedial measures, the government is adding to people's miseries by increasing the power, gas tariff and other rates and taxes and that too on the recommendation of a third party in the present case the Asian Development Bank. It is really sad to see the government yield to outside pressure, ignoring the consequential inconveniences of the masses. The ADB people, both the owners and employees, are pretty well-off backwards to the age of the barbarians? They perhaps tend to look at the problem from their own angle without putting themselves in other people's shoes. Judging from an international perspective, they seem to have failed to assess the negative impact of a raise in power tariff in the context of Bangladesh. They seem to have ignored the fact that their own income level is nearly two times higher than the average income here. Even their local employees earn nearly ten times more than their counterparts do in the public or private sector in Bangladesh. It does not need much wisdom to comprehend that with an income ten to twenty times higher than the average, it is much easier to spend two, or three times the average people do and still save a lot of money.

Therefore, it will be a fallacy of composition to say that what is good for the ADB people will

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Rehabilitating the prostitutes

Sir, Our Government has indeed taken a good step to rehabilitate the unfortunate sex workers. However, this action is particularly more significant to those poor girls, who are forced into prostitution, and thus giving them the option to get back to their respective families. But the drive should have been more planned and properly worked out, instead of hurrying the sex workers to the vagrant camps. We have time and again noticed from newspaper photographs of the sex workers that they do not appear healthy. The way they are pictured, clearly proves that they are never totally free nor relieved. The common questions that everyone may raise: how can the rehabilitation centres help their poor sex workers? and: can the centres provide them with the basic human needs?

Khawja Viqar Moinuddin, Purana Paltan, Dhaka

Poor computer service areas

Sir, It is encouraging to read in the press that the silicon city Bangalore (India) and the Bangladeshi computer industry are willing to work together to enhance export of computer products and services from this SAARC region. The exchange of technology, training of human resources and complementary export collaboration may enable these two countries to establish a niche in the export market of software services. The area to monitor and control is the probability of increased one-way border smuggling of hardware due to noticeable disparity in the import duties of foreign brand-name

group. But the views/observations made from the floor were totally excluded and that renders both the report carried by your daily as well as the intention of the self-styled 'concerned citizens group' suspect and politically motivated.

Together with the comments published, I as a concerned citizen, would have liked your reporter also to refer to the observations of Mr Waliur Rahman, former secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and new director, Bangladesh Institute of Law and International Affairs. Advocate Adilur Rahman of Supreme Court and Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue. As a member of the UN Secretary-General's Expert Group Committee on the 'Economic and Social Consequences of the Arms Race and Military Expenditures (ESCAR)', Mr Rahman made some very pertinent points: 1) Over ten years of his membership, the group published four books on the whole gamut of disarmament and development and social consequences of arms purchases. But the group could not finally conclude that any country's security and defence consideration can be measured in terms of bread and butter. It just does not happen that way, he suggested. 2) He also said in response to a panelist's contention that the MIG purchase violates the Constitution 'that this Constitution contained the Indemnity Act for 21 years thus justifying the dastardly murders of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and other innocent members of the family, then where was the 'concerned citizens committee'? — a remark with which I agree entirely.

He also mentioned about 'peace dividend' of the historic CHT Accord and no mention was made about it by the panelists. Finally, Mr Rahman said together with Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya that the present government has set a precedent for the first time in the history of Bangladesh that the defence purchase by the government has been discussed in the standing committee of Parliament in the presence of the Chief of Army Staff Lieut-General Mustafizur Rahman, the Chief

"Military muscle no answer to national security now"

Sir, My attention has been drawn to a news report published in your esteemed daily on August 6, 1999, by your staff correspondent, under the above caption. I am a regular reader of The Daily Star because of its objective reporting and unbiased editorials on most of the issues affecting our national interest. I was present at the Press Club meeting of the committee of concerned citizens on 'socio-economic implications of recent defence purchases'. In your news report, I was surprised to read only the views of the panelists who met there to criticise the government decision, which is a democratic right of any individual or

Imbecility

Sir, The activities of the so-called students belonging to the killers group and rapists group of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), a student organisation of the Awami League and some teachers of the Jahangirnagar University, one of the highest seats learning, put the entire nation to shame. Their shameless activities humiliated us both at home and abroad. Are we going backwards to the age of the barbarians?

It remains a mystery why the criminals are not arrested so far.

Iqbal Ahmed Dhaka 1000

Sylhet-Shillong bus service

Sir, Dhaka-Calcutta bus service is no longer a dream but a reality. This bus service will be of considerable help to the travelling public of both the countries. If another route is opened between Sylhet and Shillong that will also be of considerable help to the people of Sylhet division. Sylhet was part of Assam during British rule and people of Sylhet have kin and kins in Assam and Meghalaya. The route will be of commercial value as well.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Fulbari, Sylhet