

US' Relations with China Seem Back on Track

by Harun ur Rashid

The meeting in Auckland restored the bilateral relations on track between the two countries. There is unmistakable evidence that a much needed realpolitik is propelling these two great powers towards an accommodation. This is a good news for international community.

Our Governance Ranking

AFTER the human development index we now have the humane governance index. The latest reckoner of a country's governance ranking comes by virtue of a collaborative effort between the Islamabad-based think-tank Mahabub-ul-Huq Human Development Centre and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). South Asia is said to be facing a crisis in governance, and among the countries of the region Bangladesh happens to be the worst sufferer. While India is placed 42nd, Pakistan 52nd and Sri Lanka 53rd on a composite economic, political, civic governance and human development index Bangladesh's standing is the lowest at 54th.

"The crisis in governance", the report added, "could prove to be undoing for democracy." A serious warning, a dreaded prognostication that can only be ignored to a peril. To blame poor governance on the long legacy of open or disguised military rule would be making a short shrift of the fact that it has been nearly a decade that we have extricated ourselves from an autocratic system. What have we done with our nearly a decade-old democracy?

Ideal type of governance may be unthinkable without a political consensus between the ruling party and the opposition, but good governance should be within our reach if the ruling party decidedly became non-partisan both in thought and action when administering the country.

The report on our governance status comes at the propitious time because this particular issue has exercised our mind long enough to call for some action now. Yes, we are overpopulated, poor and undernourished, but that does not mean we are doomed to be governed poorly. In spite of the negative factors we can still manage to get ourselves a fair measure of good governance, if only our thinking is focused on the average citizens and we let the system work.

While half of the people have lost confidence in the present political system — what is even worse — a greater number have lost faith in their leaders because they are 'corrupt'. And the cost of their corruption is being borne by the poor people.

The report on Human Development, 1999 has to be taken seriously. In the past we have seen reports launched with great fanfare but no sooner publicity had been gained on them, their contents went into oblivion. If this happened again, it would only cost us more — in terms of lost years.

Zoo Jinx

DEATH of Sharmila, the 14-month-old tigress, has added a disquieting dimension to the authorities' indifference to and maltreatment of the inmates of so-called National Zoo. While officials ascribed infection of the deadly parasite trypanosoma as the cause of the feline's death, many point finger at improper medication, especially as regards administration of tranquilliser. Visiting International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) veterinarian Dr. Arshad Haroon Toosey's comment Saturday questioning pertinence of the tranquilliser currently used on tigers certainly lent credence to the 'unofficial' view. Whatever may have been the case, the bottomline is: four tigers have died in the span of four weeks and another is critically ill. Apparently, the authorities do not know for sure now the parasite got into the eco-system and whether the zoo is faced with the bleak prospect of a trypanosoma epidemic.

Unfortunately, over the years, successive governments have failed to ensure an environment conducive to wild-life preservation at the zoo. Their inputs have largely been restricted to constituting probe committees upon any mishaps, firing a few officials and then simply forgetting the whole affair as the dusts settled. As a result, while there has been a plethora of adhoc steps, living conditions for the caged animals have not improved a bit. The establishment looks more like a penitentiary rather than a wild-life conservatory.

Naturally the question arises as to whether the government is at all sincere in, if not incapable of, running a zoo. Incidents over the last few weeks strongly suggest that it is not. However, we would like to believe deaths of four tigers and other animals would trigger the administrative activism needed to dramatically improve the conditions there, shore up the vet department and engage trained and competent people as caretakers. Otherwise the noble thing would be to close it down and let its inmates go back to their natural habitat.

Traders' Whistle Call

THE small traders and business houses in Shantibagh area of the city have announced a plan of self-defence from the attacks of terrorists, mas-taans and illegal toll collectors. They have decided to keep bamboo clubs and whistles in their shops and establishments to resist the social parasites as they tried to barge in. Whistle will be blown if a shop is attacked and the whole fraternity will come out to face the culprits. That is the strategy. Having been pushed to the wall by the tyranny of the extortionist goons the small traders have decided to fight back in exasperation for their survival. This cannot be misconstrued as taking the law into one's own hands, rather it should be viewed in the backdrop of the administration's failed handling of the situation in which the traders have suffered.

Only last Thursday the terrorists suddenly attacked the market and opened fire. A passer-by was killed and a number of people were injured, three of them being still under treatment. Police picked up two but did not arrange protection of the businessmen. The report in a Bangla daily on Monday further said that the traders kept their shutters down for half a day on Friday and took out a procession in protest. The actions of the small traders of Shantibagh are for 'self preservation' in the absence of police cooperation.

It is only natural when people don't get the protection they need from the authorities concerned, they are forced to act on their own. The law-enforcing agencies better take charge of the situation to justify their existence.

THE two-hour meeting between President Jiang and President Clinton in Auckland (New Zealand) appears to mend their bilateral relations which have suffered a severe setback this year. This is for the first time the leaders have met after the disastrous NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in May in Belgrade. The leaders gathered together in Auckland to attend the 7th Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) Summit.

Nineteen ninety-nine has been a bad year for China-US relations: a year punctuated by a few catastrophic events — China's alleged spying activities in acquiring sophisticated US nuclear technology from its Alamos nuclear centre, the mistaken NATO (US) bombing on the Chinese embassy in Belgrade (which destroyed the floors occupied by the intelligence centre of the embassy), the US reluctance of Prime Minister Zhu Rongji's offer in April to substantially open markets in exchange for China joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and lastly the

US support to Taiwan vis-a-vis China — appear to sour relations between the two countries. However, policy analysts maintained that such bad relations could not continue for long because of their long-term interests.

Both the countries realised that they need to come to an understanding on the geo-strategic profile in the Far East. China's fundamental strategy, fear now is of gradual encirclement, with Japan as the northern claw and Australia as the southern claw of a US pincer strategy. Taiwan appears to be the symbol of this strategy and any support for Taiwan enrages China. The revision of the US-Japan alliance has proceeded apace, transforming the alliance from a simple guarantee of Japanese security to an active alliance for the whole region. Japan's participation in the development of a theatre missile defence system capable of reducing the effectiveness of Chinese missiles appears to be galling to China.

On the other hand, the growing importance and influence of China in the Far East and South-east Asia is being recognised by the US. The strategic supremacy of US in the region could be challenged by China within two decades and that appears to be the worry for the US after the end of the Cold War. The security of the Korea peninsula is fragile and China-Taiwan relations destabilise the region. China could be of great help to the US in eliminating the tension in the Far East. Both the leaders wish to build a stable relationship for their own enlightened interests which could be described as a marriage of convenience for both sides.

The question is: Why? The truth is that the real focus of their relationship, to put in blunt terms, is for money and trade. Both sides encourage dialogue because it has the advantage of strengthening economic relationship with each other. China requires foreign capital and the US needs vast market in China.

China has been affected by the Asian financial crisis. China's economy has slowed down and it is reported that an estimated 40 per cent of foreign corporations cannot earn a profit on their investment. China anticipates 7 per cent growth this year after the government has adopted a correct macro-economic policy, deepened reforms, particularly the reform of state-owned enterprises and made policy adjustments for the utilisation of foreign investment.

China has a huge potential market. The US has a keen interest to capture markets in securities, audio-visual and banking in China. Already China opened market access to insurance, telecommunications and agriculture sectors. China lifted restrictions on imports of US wheat, citrus, meat and poultry. China agreed to reduce import tariff on cars and to phase out quotas by 2005.

China's entry into WTO is necessitated by China's own economic direction. There appears to be a direct link between the opening up of China's economy and the internal momentum of Premier Zhu Rongji's reform programme. All of Asia badly wants China in the WTO to bind it to a rules-based system. For the West it is essential to Beijing's incorporation into the global economy required for building a complete and open international trade system. The logic of western policy towards China seems to be to strengthen Zhu Rongji as reformer and

weaken his internal critics. The two leaders have agreed to resume negotiations for China's entry into WTO this year. President Clinton was upbeat describing the meeting with President Jiang as "very good" and indicating that "we are working hard to make it happen soon." However political observers maintain that President Clinton faces an uphill task selling a WTO deal to Congress where many of the Republican majority have been critical of his policy of engagement with China while political opposition, according to them, is ruthlessly quelled by the Chinese leaderships.

The relationship between the two countries is not an easy one. The meeting in Auckland restored the bilateral relations on track between the two countries. There is unmistakable evidence that a much needed realpolitik is propelling these two great powers towards an accommodation. This is a good news for international community.

The writer, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Pakistan Scenario: CTBT Predicament and Opposition Campaign against Sharif

Opposition's problems are that the main party, PPP is somewhat in a disarray while its leader Benazir Bhutto and her Achilles heel husband Asif Zardari are mired in many allegations of corruption which people generally believe as genuine.

PAKISTAN prime minister Nawaz Sharif is not finally travelling to the United Nations to address the general assembly session. Contrary to earlier programme, a terse announcement from Islamabad said the PM was not making the trip. The Pakistani foreign minister last year said that his country would sign the comprehensive test ban treaty (CTBT) by September, this year. But of late, Islamabad has changed its policy on the issue, saying it cannot do it unless the American sanctions imposed on it in the wake of Islamabad's nuclear explosions last year are fully withdrawn. The "nuclear doctrine" of India which New Delhi unveiled in August this year is also being cited as another reason for Pakistan's not to abide by its earlier pledge.

Evidently, the prime minister of Pakistan is not travelling to New York since he would not like a situation where he would have to say that Islamabad is not adhering to earlier commitment. He has his own reasons — no matter whether they are aptly justified or not — for he may not be seen as faulted for backtracking on the CTBT issue. Obviously, he may like to see a situation when the signing of the CTBT appears more convenient for him — particularly taking into account the domestic sentiment. The public mood in Pakistan presently does not seem to be in favour of signing. Because, the country is still reeling under manifold sanctions even though some of the restrictions have been either called off or relaxed. Then more importantly, the Indian "nuclear doctrine" which envisages her nuclear deterrent in land, air and sea has added new concerns and thoughts in Pakistan.

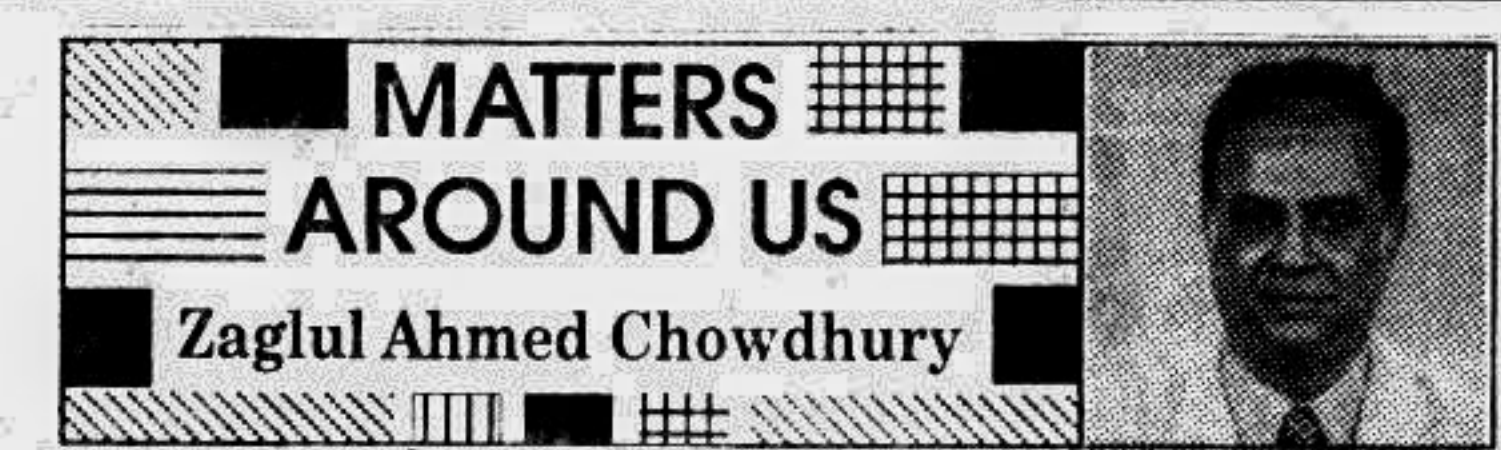
The scenario has certainly changed since Nawaz Sharif had made the pledge about the CTBT. The recent fiasco over the "Kargil" conflict has given a boost to India on the broader "Kashmir" issue. Taking into account these factors, it may sound plausible that the Pakistan prime minister may choose to stay away from the UNGA. Possibly no government

In Pakistan could afford to sign the CTBT at this stage despite a commitment.

In the aftermath of "Kargil" when the present Pakistan administration was seen by most countrymen as submitting to the United States, the signing of the CTBT might be viewed as another shameful capitulation. Prime Minister Sharif's hurriedly arranged journey to Washington at the height of the "Kargil" crisis and the agreement with President Bill Clinton on the need for honouring the sanctity of the line of control (LOC) and calling back the "Kashmiri freedom fighters" from across the LOC by abandoning the peaks they had seized in the Indian side of LOC is still too fresh in the minds of people. The opposition parties are engaged in an orchestrated clamour on the issue regardless of government's protestations that this would in fact benefit Pakistan in the long run in the effort for the settlement of the larger "Kashmir" dispute.

Prime Minister Sharif has been insisting that the "pullout" from "Kargil" had been accepted as a tactical move which would pay handsome dividends to Pakistan in the days ahead because international pressure would mount on India to solve the "Kashmir" problem and President Clinton had himself given an assurance of his interest in the matter. But the opposition is unlikely to buy this contention and continues to harp on "humiliating the nation by Sharif's government."

However, the reluctance to sign the CTBT at this point of time may have the support of the people but can Pakistan finally withstand the pressures? The IMF, understandably at the insistence of the US, is not releasing a crucial US dollar 280 million loan and is seeking to



Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

link it with the CTBT while the government badly needs the money. There are other pressures as well. How far Sharif and his administration can put up a brave face? Foreign minister Sartaj Aziz is travelling to the UNGA while finance minister Ishaq Dar is also leaving for the US to discuss the loan issue. It remains to be seen if they can score points over the critics on the loan and CTBT issues.

It is the opposition campaign on the "Kargil" issue that is causing severe headache for the PML government which has otherwise unassailable majority in the national assembly. Almost all the opposition and major religious groups have united on "oust the government" campaign, accusing the administration of "lowering" national prestige by "pullout" from "Kargil". Former cricket "idol" turned politician Imran Khan told a gathering recently in Washington that Pakistan was seen as a "stooge" of the United States in the manner Premier Sharif accepted the American president's terms in the crisis. Main opposition leader Benazir Bhutto said in London that the "humiliation" over "Kargil" was far more greater than the "Bangladesh war defeat in 1971. The Jamaat-e-Islami has kept the pot boiling against Sharif's government. Former president Farooq Leghari, who has formed the "Millat Party", said it was the bounden duty of all Pakistanis to remove the

present government after the experience over "Kargil". Opposition parties are calling frequent strikes on the issue. Arguably, they are sparing no efforts to pin down the government when they have found an opportunity. Sharif's bad relations with the MQM in the Sindh province and the turmoil in Karachi city adds to the trouble for the government. Under these circumstances, the question is will the prime minister and his government survive this situation?

Undoubtedly, the PML government, is facing an acid test to remain in power. However, the record of the present government since it came to power this time 30 months ago shows that it has the stomach. At times it appeared on the brink of a collapse or even military takeover seemed a possibility. When the prime minister was at loggerheads with president Farooq Leghari and the chief justice, and again later developed hitch with former army chief Gen. Jehangir Keramat, Nawaz Sharif looked to be on the slippery slope but he eventually came out of the crises. Opposition's problems are that the main party, PPP is somewhat in a disarray while its leader Benazir Bhutto and her Achilles heel husband Asif Zardari are mired in many allegations of corruption which people generally believe as genuine.

Imran Khan and Farooq

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.

National interest

Sir, What is the difference between 'national interest' and the 'war of liberation' interest? Is it necessary to classify and treat the two separately at the official level? It appears that one is contained within the other. The front page report in The Daily Star of September 12, also included a suggestion from an official for bringing both the print and the electronic media under the proposed national policy of the press. It is hoped that the long-term implications of these 'national' proposals be minutely debated at the public level before the final draft is put up for official approval.

A Z Dhaka.

Control the hawks

Sir, 'Powerful' Awami League is the grip of powerful hawks inside the party who are apt to ultimately spoil things in the national interest. The party chief is under their powerful grip (as it looks to outside observers, from the decisions taken by the ruling party). Now, unfortunately, the Home Minister has openly declared to take revenge against what the BNP did to AL when the former was in power (DS report Sept 14). This vendetta type of governance will not do the country any good, as can be judged from past experience in our own country, and experience abroad in other emerging countries, who also are politically unstable.

The Commerce Ministry caused embarrassment all around by prematurely pressing ahead for cabinet approval to process, in principle, the most sensitive issue of transfer of Indian goods through Bangladesh between two portions of Indian territory, after half a century of the partition of British India.

Similarly, to gain popularity, the regime hurriedly signed, without concurrence, some sort of pact with the CHT people, which is now passing through severe teething trouble. Now a very delegation of CHT residents have accompanied the PM to Europe on a joy ride to celebrate some formalities in respect of some award (why our DU was so late?).

The regime has to restrain itself in several areas; from trying to be too popular too quickly through gimmick projects (note the increase in foundation-laying ceremonies — future promises); and to spend the majority of their energy in chastising the opposition who were in power earlier (the opposition also spend more time on AL than on national issues). Now in their fourth year, they

seem to have, as per usual practice, only one aim, how to ensure preconditions to be able to remain in power after the next general election.

Violence in politics is now being accepted and practised openly by the major political parties, thereby encouraging others in the society (symptoms: emergence of a culture and its proliferation). A supporting group, such as the ruling party, can therefore never stop it as the unseen godfathers behind the official scene will continue to work in dubious manner.

Abul M Ahmad Dhaka

"Telephone number with prefix '32"

Sir, This refers to the letter under the above heading published in the DS on Sept 17. I fully endorse Mr Islam's views on telephones that start with '32'.

Not only the subscribers of Tajmahal Road but all subscribers of the dilapidated '32' exchange of T&T's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar telephone exchange are suffering untold miseries with their cursed '32' telephone lines for last four/five years.

T&T department should immediately convert these '32' numbers into digital ones and redress the long sufferings of the subscribers.

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Slum dwellers

Sir, How many terrorists have we arrested, what progress, peace and prosperity have we gained and what achievement have our authorities concerned made by demolishing hundreds of slums and making thousands of poor and destitute people shelterless all of a sudden?

The unfortunate slum dwellers are now roving from one place to another in search of a shelter and they are living a sub-human life. Why have they

not been rehabilitated or sent back to their villages as yet as promised by the government?

Had these poor people any source of income in their villages they wouldn't have come to Dhaka and work as daily labourers, rickshawpullers, sweepers house-maids etc.

We wonder why the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, Disaster Management, Ministry of Housing and Settlement and Ministry of Home Affairs are not cooperating and coordinating with each other for the settlement and employment of these affected slum dwellers?

O. H. Kabir 6, Hare Street Wari, Dhaka-1203.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

The Primeval Bug

NOW is the time for all good men and women to come to the aid of their software. Once upon a time, when Stone Age man was just cooing out of the slime, he invented the computer. It was unwieldy and not much used for killing game, but as time went on great hairy minds kept reducing the size of it until a person was able to drop it from a tree on a dinosaur's head.

Then a wise hairy man named Zilch said, "There must be other uses for a computer than to drop it on a dinosaur's head. I will develop a programme from mud so we can solve problems and make seat reservations when the airplane is invented."

Everyone laughed at him, but Zilch was determined. He worked day and night creating a programme that would make the computer useful to society. Unfortunately the computer he was working with had very little memory.

So Zilch worked out a solution. When it came to the date, let's say 497 BC, he dropped the 4 because everyone knew the century was 4. That saved enough memory to print out Neanderthal cellular phone bills for a family of four.

As time went on — and I mean lots of time — people wrote software programmes for every business in the world, including hip operations and slot machines, which got more sophisticated with each generation of computers. No one noticed that the lack of a century would have any effect on the computer system.

Hundreds of years passed without problems. Then in 1995, a freshman at MIT wrote a paper for his math class indicating that all hell would break loose in 2000 because every software programme in the last 50 years was written with two spaces for the year instead of four.

He wrote, "When the computers hit double zeros at the end of their programmes, or vice versa, they will revert their thinking to 1900 because there is nothing to tell them to go forward to the 21st century. This will wipe out the price of everything from Big Macs to Nintendo games."

The student got a D because his paper was not neatly typed. But it didn't take scientists long to realize he was right. They played games to see what would happen. A computer that was supposed to book rental cars in Hawaii fired a missile into Trump Towers, a Wall Street computer that had been instructed to purchase Treasury notes wound up with a million diseased chickens from Shanghai.

The president called a meeting to discuss a solution to the gravest problem the country had ever faced. And after talking to all the experts, the president made his decision: Every double-zero computer in the United States would be confiscated and dropped on Saddam Hussein's head. It was a great plan and restored the original purpose of the computer's invention.

I know the big question people are asking is: "Now what happens to e-mail?"

The answer is simple. You print it out, stuff it in an envelope, put on a 33-cent stamp, take it down to the post office, stick it in a box and mail it.

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OPINION

Not a Good Taste, Indeed!

A Zabr

It was refreshing to read the open and frank exchange of views at the YEP hard-talk session (DS Sep 2 & 10) about the proposed movement for autonomy of BTV.

The tone and trend of the discussion would have been different had the government officials been present, as the other side of the coin would have been presented. The stand of the ETV, a private local channel going on the air soon, was interesting, but there is scepticism on the kind and degree of the freedom which the regime (any regime) would allow through political filters, sprinkled with politicised atar (perfume).

The people have learnt bitter lessons in depending upon reports and recommendations of Commissions, and Committees, Task Forces and what not. When the will is not there, to gain time, and to defuse the

Minister. In contrast, the opposition BNP do not exist for BTV/B Betar, and all news items in regard to opposition activities are severely blacked out, day in and day out. And, is this a not an unbalanced picture, when the history books must be constantly led on the virtues of the Father of the Nation?

The resolve of the YEP meet to organise a freedom or autonomy movement for BTV is encouraging and the one-ered janata should be enthusiastic about it. It remains to be seen how the authorities control this peaceful movement, when the non-cooperation movement reaches the peak and BTV has to live on canned feeds.

The political parties have failed to live up to their respective aspirations and expectations. This ignoble fall from the pedestal, centering specially on granting immediate autonomy to the electronic media, will go down in political history as one of the blackest ages in the politics of Bangladesh. Only sticking to power does not enhance reputation, and sticking to BTV (in the pocket) is not that licking-good in cultural taste either.