Dhaka, Tuesday, December 7, 1999

Dulling Out of a Great Day

FROM idealism to opportunism this has been the steepest fall that national politics has experienced to-date. This is the bottomline feeling we have had as the Democracy or Anti-Autocracy Day passed off yesterday. There was a clarity in the politics of 1990 when the pro-democracy forces waged a unified movement against the autocracy which had been personified by Ershad. There was democracy on one side and autocracy on the other with nothing in-between to confuse the people.

Also, to fit in with the popular aspirations that gave their movement the surge and momentum of an upheaval, the three alliances spearheading it entered into a 19-point agreement for a principled governance of the country after the fall of autocracy.

That covenant of understanding is now in tatters; but what has been infinitely so much more harmful to the polity than a breach of contract, as it were, is a growing feeling among the people that crass opportunism has eliminated the minimal trace of idealism that one had expected to see in national politics. It was the Awami League which gave the precious extra bit of footing to the Jatiya Party (beyond its electoral showing) by cosying up to Ershad following the 1996 election to form the government. Convenience was placed atop principle and the people woke up to a confused state of mind regarding the democratic upsurge of 1990. And, now in 1999, it is the BNP which appears to be paying the AL back in its own coin waxing entirely forgetful of the pathological dislike for Ershad and his party it had exuded up until the other day. The new alignment went even further to embrace elements that stood discredited for their role in the liberation war. It seemed like a reversal full circle.

Set against the backdrop of that ethical degeneracy of politics, how can the AL and BNP celebrate the rebirth of democracy nine years ago with any undiminished sense of conviction because they have lost most of it over time? Haven't they?

Politics that is entirely cut off from ideological or ethical moorings cannot make good things happen. That's for sure.

Mayor's Commercial Flair

ELECTORAL impulses seem to have overwhelmed Mr. Mayor's ethical, environmental and aesthetic judgement. To make good on his election pledge to rehabilitate streetside hawkers, he appears hell-bent on pushing through his plan to construct a market at the Osmany Udyan, no matter what. So much so that he has ignored "strong opposition" among high officials at the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and criticism from different quarters. Intriguingly, he looks intent on even undermining the ruling party's commitment to protect the lone patch of greenery between the old and new parts of the capital, albeit induced by a public outcry earlier on.

The cited reason for easing traffic jam by rehabilitating street-side hawkers in the market, especially in the context of its proposed location, does not hold much water. Another shopping place in one of the capital's busiest commercial hubs looks bound to put more load on the already pressured road network. With an increased flow of traffic which the proposed hawker market would inevitably induce we are actually visualising a total break-down of the traffic system. Besides, there is the question of eco-balance. Reduction of open space in an almost crammed area with concrete jungle would be inviting an environmental disaster.

In recent times, the DCC has shown an inclination towards commercialising whatever open space the city has in total disregard for the extant laws and with indifference to the residents' plight. The encroachment of Osmany Udyan for a hawker market comes as the latest in city father's vulgar commercialisation of the metropolis. The capital is already suffering from unplanned urbanisation and surely can do without such a mindless venture as the construction of a hawker market there. We urge the prime minister to intervene, for the Mayor's decision contradicts her government's commitment to maintain an ecobalance. He should be made to explain what he is up to?

Sort it Out through Talks

FFICIALS of Power Development Board have Uthreatened to go on 'mass leave' for three days from Tuesday to realise their demands. The list of grievances principally includes cancellation of a government decision to set up Ashuganj Power Company as per recommendation of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The Ashuganj Power Station generates 750 megawatt everyday as the single largest producer of electricity in the country which has a total daily generation capacity of 2500 megawatt. Naturally a dislocation at Ashugunj can cause serious power crisis in an already depressing scenario and put the government in an embarrassing situation. The officers' association has been joined by the Karmachari Samity and together they have formed an Oikya Parishad (unity council) to carry forward their agitation. Despite the government ban on strikes following an official declaration of their services as "essential", they have decided to go ahead with their agitational programme. The power station will not be shut down by the agitating officers but in case of any dislocation or tripping, the engineers will not be at hand to solve the problem.

The picture of power generation and distribution has been very depressing over the last few years. The entire country reels under load-shedding or power cuts everyday causing immense suffering to people in general and the business, industry and hospitals in particular. We urge the Karmakarta Samity to keep in mind the difficulties of the people and opt for a negotiated settlement of the problem; for which, of course, the government should come forward with a serious initiative in the first place.

Dhaka, Tuesday, December 7, 1999

'Does China Matter?'

Today, after the cold war, the world is witnessing great power transitions in which China has risen faster than most people anticipated. Any attempt to pinpoint its standing in the global order at a given point of time serves the purpose only of an academic interest.

was like a bombshell blasting China with words Inot only pungent but lethal. China after years of its projection as an economic powerhouse, fast growing nuclear military power and potentially a superpower by the middle of twentyfirst century is now called at the best a 'middle power of middle kingdom' in the 'Foreign Affairs' — the prestigious journal published from New York. Gerald Segal, the author of an incisive article carried in its latest issue (September-October 1999) raised a stirring question if China at all mattered in US foreign policy. Because, to him China has been unduly overrated as a market, power and source of ideas which it never had been. But only a year before Bill Clinton was exchanging his US-China summit in Beijing.

The President of the world's sole superpower does not go for summitry with a puny as China is described by Gerald Segal in his article - Does China Matter? Moreover, for years we were fed on the notions of China's burgeoning power by none other than powerful western media itself. Through its dissemination of information we know of China's post-reform miracles: its double-digit growth rate, quadrupling of its per capita GDP and an uninterrupted increase in the volume of its foreign trade since 1978 making China's prospects inevitable to become the world's second largest economy by the turn of the century.

Not only that China is moving fast to balance it with her military, another key dimension of national power. She is now engaged in one of the most expensive and rapid military

AW enforcement being the

primary responsibility of

the police in any country.

in turn the guardians of the law

should be perceived as the

saviours of the public. Then

why is it that the police station

is seen by both the intelli-

gentsia and the masses as a

torture chamber rather than as

a place of Sanctuary? Not only

in Pakistan and many other

less developed countries (LDCs)

but also in many democratic

and developed countries of the

world the police carry such an

aura of fear that common citi-

zens find it virtually impossi-

ble to approach them for suc-

cour, in fairness this could well

be unfounded in most cases.

based on wrong perceptions.

The debate whether to have a

metropolitan police or not is

more a matter of semantics

than anything else, corruption

and collaboration in crime are

manifest in all the systems, it is

only the honest intent of the

leader/s that gives the process

integrity. New York carried a

terrible reputation as a city less

than a decade ago, its police

force had an ugly face, yet today

the same New York Police

Department (NYPD) is consid-

ered a model for others to adopt

- the result of Mayor Rudolph

Giuliani's superb efforts to turn

that unsavoury image around

by bringing in meaningful re-

forms across the board, in par-

ticular "Humanising the Police

Stations" as referred to in an

article on March 15, 1997 by

trasting needs other than crime

than those of other countries -

ethnic, sectarian, cultural di-

vide, etc. being some of them.

The police station (thana) car-

ries no fear for the habitual of-

fender, invariably he (or she)

has worked out a comfortable

cast-iron arrangement with the

law enforcers that is seldom

broken, in many cases criminal

Pakistan has far more con-

that title in THE NATION.

build up of the world. China is the world and with its third largest nuclear arsenal, has since deployed her nuclear weapons of intercontinental reach. Only after the USA, she is the biggest military spender not to become a second rate military power. China's grand modernisation of military including her nuclear tests a few years back defying the test ban treaty is pointer to her great as a contract of the world. China is the world monor despends to the world with the world with the world monor despends to the world with the

not to become a second rate military power. China's grand modernisation of military including her nuclear tests a few years back defying the test ban treaty is pointer to her great power ambition. Though limited, China already has an inventory of full range USS-4 land based intercontinental missiles and ballistic missile

power is yet to be clearly assessed she with her power potentials and growing international prestige can be catapulted to the leadership of a network of states inimical to western objectives and interests. Symptomatic of that trend are China's close military cooperation with Russia, its technological and political help to the Islamic states in Central Asia and North Africa and its looming influence in East Asia where she has assumed an aggressive posture in South China sea. All these factors taken together put her at the centre of an informal concert of states which can one day challenge the prolonged domination of the western civilization. As a member of the UN Security Council she wields an enviable

influence over the nations of

Although China's political

submarine.

the world rupturing the west's monopolistic hold on the international system. All this adequately explains why the west desperately keeps her constructively engaged even if grudgingly. Will this be done for an

It is not however the west's forecasts only that China is a power to be reckoned with. China's sheer size and inherent strength, its conception of itself as a centre of global civilisation and its eagerness to redeem centuries of humiliation are pro-

down to its size in western imagination? While China's growing military and nuclear power as well as her inflexible positions on regional issues like Taiwan and Spratley Islands cause anxiety for the neighbours, some of the Chinese moves have indeed thrown challenges of global proportion which only the United States can think of tackling. By dint of diplomatic dexterity and nuclear power status China indeed began to act as if it were already a global power right during the



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

pelling it towards a dominant role in the global system. Many more factors contribute to China's more assertive role, not the least its sense of being Asia's naturally dominant power. It is not surprising that since the demise of the cold war she started articulating her newly acquired strength and exercising her independent choices in world politics. It seems almost indisputable that within a decade or two China will seek to become paramount power on its

Can this trend be checkmated simply by cutting China eighties.

During the first half of 1989 China was able to place both the US and the Soviet Union in the role of supplicants paying official state visits to Beijing. The Sino-Soviet summit in May 1989 ended nearly thirty years' estrangement largely on China's term without discernible damage to Sino-American partnership on wide range of issues including military and security matters. Since 1984 Washington also has been regularly consulting her on arms control and disarmament issues even incorporating Beijing's views in its double-zero negotiating position on the INF treaty with Moscow — a clear recognition of China's clout in such strategic issues.

Yet the observation and assessments of Gerald Segal is highly empirical. After all, just how robust are China's economy and military muscle by all available indices? Just where does she stand in a comparative scale in contemporary global settings? Segal has tried to determine it with utmost honesty. According to him, in 1997 China accounted for only 3.5 per cent of the World's GNP ranking seventh in the world just ahead of Brazil but well behind Italy. As per UN Human Development index China was 107th bracketed with Albania and Namibia. In term of international trade and investment the story is much the same. China made up mere 3 per cent of world trade in 1997 despite all hypes about its economy. As regards investment, at its peak, some of its \$45b inflow came from ethnic Chinese of East Asia and very little from the developed world.

It is also true that in strategic term the Chinese challenge
is nothing like the Soviet one.
China is less like the Soviet
Union in 1950s than like perhaps Iraq in 1990s: a regional
threat to western interests, not
a global ideological rival. China's military clout can be
gauged also from the quantum
of Chinese arms transfers
which stand barely at 2.2 per

cent of total arms transfers in 1997. The 'strategic partner-ship' between China and the US—so often highlighted—hardly means anything. Because on no one significant strategic issue they are on the same side; neither are their capabilities compatible for such partnership between them.

However, the missing point

in the whole debate is perhaps

the fact that in the ever revolving cycle of the rise and fall of the great powers China is on ascendancy. What is significant here is the full potentials of China as a swiftly rising power. During the period of such historic transition the national power cannot be measured in term of arithmetical figures which constantly change under the force of myriad dynamics at work. In 1800, China itself accounted for 33 percent of world manufacturing output. By 1900 she was down to 6.2 per cent. In the meantime the United States which was 0.8 percent in 1800 rose to 23.6 per cent in 1900 and 25.6 per cent in 1997.

The nation's rating as a power is hardly proportionate to any single factor. It lies in the maze of commutation and permutation of many equations of power-play which themselves keep changing. Then there are many abstract values which cannot be arithmetically measured but add to the strength of a nation. Today, after the cold war, the world is witnessing great power transitions in which China has risen faster than most people anticipated. Any attempt to pinpoint its standing in the global order at a given point of time serves the purpose only of an academic

The Police Station

Sanctuary or Torture Chamber?

Radical measures have to be taken at the grassroots level of social interaction to create trust in the minds of the citizens and thus take the first step in making the police effective at the grassroots level of the social structure. To make this experimental model successful, some police stations in the urban area should be made models for adoption.

plans may even have emanated from these precincts. The irony is that it is the honest, Godfearing citizens who dread a trip to the police station. For women to go to the police station to even report a crime is akin to Doomsday, the mass perception being that both selfrespect and honour may be at stake. This terrible state of affairs does not even begin to describe how these so-called sanctuaries have turned virtually into dens of evil, arousing emotions of both fear and hatred, the exact opposite of what the Police Station should evoke from the people in the vicinity. The Punjab Government re-

quested a pilot project in 1997 for a model police station in 1997, the Punjab Police reacted to the Presentation of PROJECT HIFAZAT (a plan for 10 such Police Stations) as if a basket of cobras had been hurled into their midst. Our "democratic" governments need the muscle of the police services to impose their brand of democracy on the people they "serve", in such an environment that innovative plan never saw fruition and was still-born. Every new government engages in Police reforms by changing a few faces in the police hierarchy, the new rulers are led to believe that they have "turned around" the whole organisation. This process involves wholesale re-shuffling of Station House Officers (SHOs), the police executives controlling the Thanas, the musical

chairs involves putting

favourites into lucrative places. ordering those out of favour to report to HQ. The nature of the SHO or the Police Station does not change and life goes on but with different faces and names. In the rural areas the situation is far worse as the local Zamindars exercise the power of life and death over the population in their areas. The plan proposed to the Punjab government was pragmatic and farreaching for the country, moreover, it did not add a penny to the budget despite asking for a

its components that was of immense importance to the concept of turning the reputation of a torture chamber to a place of sanctuary. HRD envisaged a (1) Judicial section. (2) Citizen-Police Liaison Committee with four sub-sections, namely (a) Public Relations (b) Arbitration (c) Legal Aid and (d) medical aid. Magistrates in the Judicial section were to be available on the premises 24 hours to give legal cover to those in police custody. To be remanded police had to seek judicial order from the

ASISEEIT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

salary increase to meet minimum living costs. If the police at the lower end of the tier is not well paid or does not have facilities, mostly because their budget is skimmed off at various stages, corruption becomes a

PROJECT HIFAZAT proposed an "Operations Management Division" and a "Human Resources Division" in the Police Station. While the Operations Management Division (OMD) was structured to make the services available to the public more efficient, it was the addition of the Human Resources Division (HRD) and

magistrate on duty. The powers of the police to hold a person in custody without judicial process was to be curtailed. The plan called for elected Local Councillors Court to act not only for arbitration but also as mediators in the cases referred to it by the magistrates or failing that, to bring the case to trial. There are many disputes which can be settled locally instead of escalating into possible crimes or being the subject of long drawn out court cases. Higher Courts need a break from being overloaded with trivial issues. A small medical room, duly manned by doctors

24 hours, will also function to provide much needed first aid or specialist referrals. A Female-cum-Juvenile Section was to handle these special categories. Today there is no mechanism to handle specialist problems, all are treated with the same broad brush, with hard bristles.

The Operational

Management Division (OMD) must invariably be handled by someone with the rank of DSP; important police stations may even have Superintendents of Police (SPs). OMD can be organised into Sections of (1) Information, (2) Criminal Investigation. (3) Patrolling. (4) Security, (5) Crime Prevention and (6) Administration. The Computerised Information Section should be (1) linked to the National Data Organisation (NDO) either directly or indirectly and should have data about all citizens residing in the area, they would also record well their complaints/grievances when made, (2) maintain proper blown-up maps of every structure in the area. (3) record of known criminals, their relatives, friends and contacts, (4) forensic section with capability of fingerprinting and making photos of the scene of crime, (5) record of ethnic, religious and radical activists in the area and (6) maintaining liaison with adjacent Police Stations.

When a citizen builds up the courage to go to the police station to record his (or her)

grievance, the police officers on duty are not only reluctant to record the grievance but tend to treat the complainant as an accused. Their conduct being intimidating, it is almost impossible for women to take this risk! The law and the police rules necessitate logging of every information in the Station Diary (SD), which is today mostly, according to common prevalent practices in the hands of an unauthorised person, a constable. Before condemning the police for being corrupt, inefficient and negligent of their duty, we have to be fair and acknowledge that the Police Station as it is organised presently, does not have (1) a proper organisation and management, (2) enough funds. (3) proper information, (4) proper mechanism for quick redress of grievances, (5) citizen-police liaison to remove citizens' distrust of the PS and its staff and (6) availability of dispensation of justice at the basic level.

Radical measures have to be taken at the grassroots level of social interaction to create trust in the minds of the citizens and thus take the first step in making the police effective at the grassroots level of the social structure. To make this experimental model successful, some police stations in the urban area should be made models for adoption. Changes will have to be made in line with the experience gained as the experiment progresses. The police personnel should not be changed, they should be made to do their job. Effective monitoring can be provided "on the job" by the Human Resources Division. The idea is to convert the Police Station from a den of fear to an oasis of peace for the citizenry of the area. This can only be done by humanising the police station, turning it from a torture chamber to a place of genuine sanctuary.

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.

The Frog story

Sir, Let me tell you a story. It is one of the stories of Aesop. Some boys were throwing stones at the frogs in a pond, and the frogs were trying to save themselves from the attack. After some time, an old frog told the boys to stop it because "what was a game to them was death to the frogs".

Almost a similar thing is happening in Bangladesh. Our power-hungry politicians both from the ruling party and of the opposition are very busy doing their best either to remain in power or to grab it while we, the 120 million people of the country, are suffering.

Will anybody come forward

and save us from these power-

Iqbal Ahmed Dhaka

hungry politicians?

Politics and politicians

Sir, It seems our political parties, forming government or in opposition, are hardly conscious of the sentiments and desires of the electorate on whose mandate they stand to administer the country. Once they come to power they just don't give a hoot for good governance or the real welfare of the people and it is rather intriguing to note that even when thinking about contesting elections they blatantly only pursue their own welfare and selfish objectives. The mandate of the electorate is of least significance to them. If this be the

racy in this country getting poorer and more wretched by the day, then there is indeed no hope for us for the future.

The four chiefs of the princi-

pal opposition parties have very graciously decided to scrap SPA and make the electronic media free of state control if voted to form government and also to opt for coalition government for their own accommodation. But have they ever. shown us and how they could improve the lot of the people or create jobs for them or let them live in peace and tranquillity or serve them in the way responsible governments in civilised countries do? These disoriented and irresponsible political parties reflect the shallowness of mind and ineptitude to govern the country for the welfare of the people. All we hear from the ruling and the opposition party people capitalising on the votes of the poor and downtrodden masses are 'my people' and 'my country' but all we get from them is the least care for the 'people' and the 'country'.

Ahmed Sharif House 22, Road 35

Gulshan, Dhaka

Blame the voters, once to power they just hoot for good governe real welfare of the it is rather intrigulate that even when bout contesting electrol blatantly only pursum welfare and self-wes. The mandate of ate is of least signifiate is of least signifiate in this be the

ethnic, sectarian, religious or ideological compulsions.

Who shapes this debate? The people do. And they get exactly what they deserve, for not appreciating the gift - and the nuances - of democracy.

Abhijit Mitra USA

City parks

Sir. Thank you very much for the forceful statement conveyed in the editorial of The Daily Star on 21.11.99 which was based on the investigative and factual reporting by one of your excellent correspondents Mr. Morshed Ali Khan. He also deserves thanks for writing such a wonderful report on the pitiable and deplorable condi-

tions of the city parks. We have read with keen interest the plight of the city dwellers who are gasping for breath, so to say. There has been an all round deterioration of the city — be it in the traffic. law and order or citizen's behaviour. Lack of respect for the convenience of others and disregard to the norms of living a peaceful and decent life in the metropolitan city have made the day to day living miserable. The frank and free discussion of the hon'ble Mayor of the . Dhaka City Corporation with a leading newspaper correspon dent and the investigative report of Mr. Morshed Ali Khan must have drawn the attention of all who bother about decent civic ameniues of a city life.

There seems to be lack of effective coordination among the engineering estate and conservancy departments. These are administrative and functional matters. The decision making authorities and senior executives of the City Corporation may deal with these aspects of the capital city with determination and keeping in view the assurances given by the houble Mayor to the city dwellers from

time to time about improving the civic amenities ensuring the proper maintenance of the parks which were developed by incurring huge expenditure. In that, inadequacy of resources should not be considered as a tenable plea. Such determined action by the City Corporation will go a long way in rehabilitation of its image, should they really intend to do so.

. Afzalur Rahman Road#4, House#14 Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka-1205

The stability in New Delhi

Sir, To some, it might appear that Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee came back to power by default, leading a newly-moulded, unwieldy mass carrying the banner of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

The massive, hoary and rusted (but trusted) Congress Party under Sonia Gandhi has neither been fully reassembled after the overhauling, nor finetuned for mobility and generation of the right type of gover-nance for the world's largest democracy. As a brand new leader of an old party, she needs more time to display a seamless welding, internally, and externally. The monitoring would be strict after the teething period under the new leadership. Congress has the mass to deliver, but the medium has to click first.

A political party or alliance has mass, volume, mobility, and a sense of direction. NDA has more volume than mass, hence the decision-making process would be slow; and the directional pulls may be erratic. A large volume restricts movement, and also unnecessary mass (a lean and trim team is the goal). The internal synergy inside a big alliance would cause large systems loss (the previous unstable regimes).

The background is also dubious: political instability in the form of three general elec-

tions in as many years. The voter-fatigue cannot be discounted; and the reactions cannot be predicted with practical accuracy. The weary anticipation of the electorate would be critical for the fourth assessment. Vajpayee is once again on trial, perhaps for the last time.

There is no third force at

this current situation. Hence the formation of a second force or front would be mentally acceptable. Here the Congress can encash its archives and assets for investment for a come-back. The national stability curve has to be on the upward trend, due to political fatigue on all fronts. Too much national energy has been spent and wasted for finding a solution towards stable governance, in a heterogeneous society of nearly one billion people.

In New Delhi, some distinct polarisation has to take place within the next three to six months, to indicate which way the political wind is blowing, as the situation is delicately poised immediately after the election (unstable equilibrium)

election (unstable equilibrium) The NDA characterises a top-heavy configuration, hence the performance will be diluted at the lower levels. The shape of a mass also determines the mobility. A circular (cohesive) shape rolls easily. A square has four corners, and a cube has eight to transverse. A triangle (or pyramid) bloated at the top is top-heavy and unbalanced, and will try to shed the excess weight at the top. The Congress could not win by default, as it is not yet ready to get into the top

Transitions mean changing curves. India is experiencing the winds of change.

A Husnain Dhaka

Our language

Sir. The proclamation of February 21 as the 'International Mother Language Day' by the United Nations Educational. Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has brought a great honour for our language martyrs as well as for the nation as a whole.

By doing so, the UNESCO has upheld its universal appeal to establish peace and to ensure development all over the world. This declaration also reflects UNESCO's noble aim to retain world's cultural heritage.

M Zahidul Haque Associate professor BAI. Sher e Bangla Nagar Dhaka-1207

Road needs repair work

Sir. The condition of the Homna-Gouripur road demands immediate repair work. It is known and observed that this road is not repaired or main-tained for the last three years. causing immense sufferings to the people of Homna and Daudkandi thanas - from Gouripur main road to Gouripur Bazaar. The 19 km long road has been damaged and become very risky to use. Already some accidents have occurred. All the baily bridges have become loose and the speedy buses create unbearable sound endangering the lives of heart disease patients

Furthermore the Kuchcha road from Batakandi Bazar to Kalir Bazar via Barkawnia is also badly damaged during last year's unprecedented flood.

Under the above circumstances, we appeal to the authorities concerned to do the

meedful.

Md Emdadul Huq Badsha
Charkumaria, Shatani
Daudkandi, Comilla.

and children.