

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.

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.

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 overwheeled Mr. Mayor's ethical, environmental and aesthetic judgement. To make good on his election pledge to rehabilitate street-side hawkers, he appears hell-bent on pushing through his plan to construct a market at the Osmany Udyan, no matter what.

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.

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.

Sort it Out through Talks

OFFICIALS of Power Development Board have threatened 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.

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.

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.

IT was like a bombshell blasting China with words not 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 twenty-first century is now called at the best a 'middle power of middle kingdom' in the 'Foreign Affairs' — the prestigious journal published from New York.

The President of the world's sole superpower does not go for summery 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.

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

'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.

build up of the world. China is the only Asian member of nuclear club 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 power ambition. Though limited, China already has an inventory of full range USS-4 land based intercontinental missiles and ballistic missile submarine.

Although China's political 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

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 for an inconsequential middle power? 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 propelling it towards a dominant role in the global system.

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 Bei-

jing'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 terms 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 hype about its economy. As regards investment, at its peak, some of its \$45 billion 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 partnership 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 per cent of world manufacturing output. By 1900 she was down to 6 per cent in the meantime the United States which was 0.8 per cent 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 interest.



PERSPECTIVES by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

elling 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 side of the Pacific.

Can this trend be checked simply by cutting China

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, God-fearing 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 by being respected and honoured 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 requested a pilot project in 1997 for a model police station in the Presentation of PROJECT HIFAZAT in 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

favoured 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 far-reaching for the country, moreover, it did not add a penny to the budget despite asking for a

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 necessity for them.

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 falling 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-Child-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 as 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.

AS I SEE IT Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

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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-hungry politicians?

Iqbal Ahmed Dhaka

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

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 conditions 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 correspondent and the investigative report of Mr. Morshed Ali Khan must have drawn the attention of all who bother about decent civic amenities 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 hon'ble 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 never been fully reassembled after the overhauling, nor fine-tuned for mobility and generation of the right type of governance 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).

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 maintained 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 bally bridges have become loose and the speedy buses create unbearable sound endangering the lives of heart disease patients and children.

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 needful.

Md Emadul Huq Badsha Charkumaria, Shatgan Daudkandi, Comilla.