

Khaleda-Megawati talks

Broader Asian cooperation envisaged

At their talks in Jakarta, Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri and Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia struck a wider Asian note. They underscored the need for a larger forum girdling SAARC and ASEAN in order to try and meet the stupendous challenges of globalisation.

At a bilateral level, the signing of four treaties and two memorandums of understanding during the current visit of Bangladesh PM Khaleda Zia to Jakarta has been amply illustrative of how productive their talks proved. Though there is a huge trade gap between the two countries, with the balance tilted heavily towards Indonesia, assurances by Megawati Sukarnoputri that she would encourage her country's businessmen to import more products from Bangladesh have gone down very well in Dhaka. Not only that, in concrete terms, she has agreed to accord duty-free access to 23 Bangladeshi products in the Indonesian market.

There is something that devolves on us following the extension of duty-free access by another country. The gaining of liberal trade terms from Thailand and Indonesia means that we should raise our productivity levels and diversify our exports, let alone firm up the fiscal assistance package. The quality of our products and the timeliness of our deliveries should leave nothing to be desired.

Getting back to the official talks, the emphasis on sharing of information and intelligence among Asian countries pertaining to combating the problem of terrorism couldn't have come a day earlier.

Of immense potential importance is also the fact that in matters of exploration and extraction of natural resources, patronex and Bapex, the public companies of the two countries, would enter into effective cooperation and share their experiences.

Power-play on government land

Avicious trend set for expropriation

THE two major political parties are reported to have set up no fewer than 400 offices on illegally grabbed land in the city. And the number is increasing day by day. That reflects negatively on the lenient views of the ruling BNP and main opposition Awami League on land grabbing -- a major source of drain on public property. It is also an indication of how illegal practices are being patronised by the two parties.

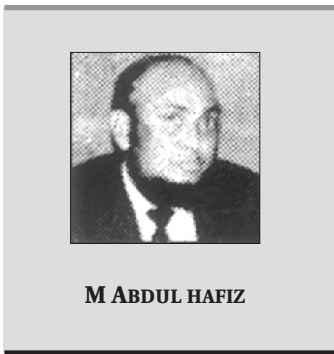
The practice, however, is not new. It has been observed over the last two decades or so that political parties set up make-shift offices in different localities, with the party-in-power usually leading this process of illegal acquisition. The parties also appear to be in tacit agreement over the practice, though it is a blatant violation of the law. It is not clear how we can deal with the malaise of land grabbing when the two leading political parties give indulgence to such activities.

The parties should be aware of the social repercussion of their being engaged in land grabbing -- a palpable offence. What message do people get when they watch the political party supporters not showing the slightest respect for the law?

The DCC and the law enforcers are in charge of preventing land grabbing, but they have certainly failed to cope with the situation. But, then, the political parties are the ones which have to explain how land grabbing could continue on such a scale.

They should openly declare their intent and action plan on the issue and immediately have all the illegally occupied lands vacated. The leaders should, for once, be less appreciative of the doings of their followers, particularly when they are flouting the law in a very conspicuous manner.

Gaddafi's courtship with the west



SELDOM has the anatomy of a revolutionary been simple. When it comes to Muamar Gaddafi of Libya it is in the least. Gaddafi was a young colonel of 27 when he led a coup against the monarchy in Libya that was cooperating with the west in the development of newly discovered oil wealth. He also was deeply upset by the Israeli rout of the Arabs in 1967 which he attributed to corrupt Arab regimes collaborating with the western imperialists. He therefore became something of a maverick extending support to nationalist movements including those resorting to terrorism. While pursuing an ideology that included elements of nationalism, socialism and Islam he pursued an agenda that was based on opposition to

western hegemony -- rendering his task doubly difficult.

With his peculiar revolutionary impulse his clash with the west was at one time or other inevitable. Moreover, the policy he pursued led him to back all movements hostile to the west. He also rejected monarchical regimes that splashed the Arab world and most of which found it expedient

of 1973 with Israel, eventually the power realities on the ground reasserted themselves.

Reckless as he was Gaddafi seldom drew lesson from any of the predicaments faced by him and his militant support to the liberation movements, particularly his backing to the Palestinian cause brought him into conflict with the US that considered his policies

country's economy. This proved to be a turning point in his adventure and considerably dampened his revolutionary zeal.

The US' victory in the cold war in 1989, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War 1991 placed the US in position of such dominance that Gaddafi began to see the need for more pragmatic approach in his policy

families of the 270 persons killed in the crash. This led the United Nations to lift the sanctions on Libya.

But that wasn't all. The US did not lift the sanctions -- which matters most because it categorised Libya as a 'terrorist' state that, it is alleged, was supporting and financing international terrorism. The US now also insisted upon WMD

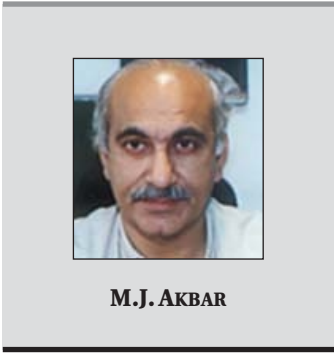
chemical weapons among the stockpiles of the rusting Soviet-era military equipment but nothing much in the biological or nuclear sphere apart, of course from aspirations. The International Atomic Energy's Mohammed El Baradei arrived in Tripoli in the weekend and it will be interesting to see what his inspection yields.

WMD or no WMD, according to official Libyan statement Gaddafi was reluctant to make the statement of his renunciation of WMD, but was prevailed upon to do so by Tony Blair and George W. Bush. Following the capture of Saddam Hussein they were keen on another feather on their cap before the Christmas. Osama bin Laden remained out of reach, so the colonel would have to do the trick on his new friends' insistence.

The final stage of negotiation reportedly included a 30-minute telephone conversation between Gaddafi and Blair who later described the Libyan leader as "courageous." Jack Straw chipped in with comment "statesman like." So at least one Arab country garners plaudits for giving up weapon it never possessed.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BIIS.

A history of slogans



THREE decades ago Indira Gandhi caught a tide in the affairs of India, surprised her friends, stunned her foes and swept to victory with a simple, devastating slogan: 'Garibi Hatao'. It was the urge of the moment. She alone of all the heavyweights in the Congress saw through the clutter, and picked up the obvious.

Six years and an Emergency later, the Opposition did the same. Slogans had not diminished poverty to any significant extent. A desperate Indira Gandhi sought to turn free India into yet another Third World tinpot dictatorship. She threw all Opposition leaders into jail. Nothing opens eyes faster than the shutting of prison doors. The Opposition united under the Janata banner, and stormed to power in 1977 with an evocative message: 'Indira Hatao, Desh Bachao'.

In December 1979, Indira Gandhi reversed that message. The Janata government could not be severely faulted on governance, but its politics was execrable, stupid, egomaniacal and suicidal. Defections broke the government. Rising prices proved that everything was out of control. This time the Janata had to be removed to save the people.

In January 1984 Rajiv Gandhi did not need a slogan: the iconic image of a martyred mother flooded Parliament with Congress MPs. Rajiv, misled by the usual suspects, began to believe that the mandate had been for his youth and sought to reshape the Congress in his image. Sneakers sneaked under the khadi pyjamas. It was a costly error. The

Opposition, which would have taken a decade to harm the memory of Indira Gandhi, took only a couple of years to destroy an increasingly naive Rajiv. Corruption charges over the Bofors gun deal muddled his reputation. The slogan that brought V.P. Singh to power was a provocative one: 'Galli galli mein shor hai, Rajiv Gandhi chor hai'. It was a trifle unfair, but politics is not a game for the squeamish. A more powerful chant was led by L.K. Advani

stretched out their hands. Rao bribed each one with promotions in his next Cabinet reshuffle. They took the bribes and lived happily till the elections of 1996. That is when their joy ended. In 1996 Rao had no slogan, because he had nothing to say. Obviously, he could not appeal to a traditional vote of the Congress, Muslims. That was a remarkable election because Rao believed that a deal with political parties was preferable to a deal with

the credit for. He was trapped by the legacy of 1971. He was an Indira man, and thought that he could sell a dead slogan even after he had personally killed it by dismantling the failed theories of the 70s in order to save the economy of the 90s. Rao thought that economic reforms could be slipped through surreptitiously. The Congress is still confused about liberalisation.

Rao's successor Sitaram Kesri had no slogan either, but then the

BYLINE
Vajpayee's single biggest success has been to restore hope into the Indian air, and a belief that genuine economic progress is possible, and within our lifetime. His adjacent vision of peace fits in well, because progress shifts from arithmetical speed to geometrical speed with peace. In a sense he has reintroduced the mood that Jawaharlal Nehru created in 1957, when the messenger of world peace meshed his vision with the promise of the Five Year Plans. The voter is not a fool. He does not expect miracles to happen, and is wary of any false slogans.

and the BJP: 'Mandir wahin banayenge'. We shall build a temple to the Lord Ram only at the spot where the Babri mosque stands. Ayodhya entered the centrestage of Indian politics.

Rajiv Gandhi laid the foundations of Advani's dream and P.V. Narasimha Rao fulfilled it. Poorly advised by R.K. Dhawan and Buta Singh, Rajiv sought to appease the burgeoning BJP vote by laying the foundations of the temple. On 6 December 1992 Rao did nothing while the mosque was destroyed. He did more of nothing when a small temple was quickly erected at that spot and worship began. The young Rajesh Pilot, still hopeful that something could be salvaged politically, argued that even if the destruction had not been stopped the construction could be prevented. Rao ignored him. A temple to Lord Ram now stands at Ayodhya. The VHP's current demand is slightly misplaced: it is not asking for a temple, it is only asking for a bigger temple.

The home minister of the time, S.B. Chavan remained as studiously loyal to Rao as he is loyal to Sonia Gandhi today. The clutch of Muslim leaders in the Congress, held their tongues and

voters. So he concentrated on arrangements like the one he made with Kanshi Ram and Mayawati's BSP in Uttar Pradesh. Add the Congress vote to the BSP's and voila! It is extraordinary how the shrewdest politicians forge that an election is algebra rather than arithmetic, that it takes more than one factor to build an equation. It also needs chemistry, but Rao was noticeably lacking in this aspect.

The Congress could have recovered from Rajiv Gandhi's defeat in UP, but it could never recover from Rao's alliance in UP. Rao simply ceded vast amounts of electoral space to Mayawati, who occupied what she got, and refused to vacate it. The Dalits were lost completely to the Congress after 1996. With the Muslims shifting to either the BSP or Mulayam Singh Yadav, and the Brahmins turning to BJP, the Congress was left with nothing more than memories. Sonia Gandhi's alliance with Mayawati, if it happens, will confirm that Congress has formally accepted its status as a disappearing memory in UP.

Rao could not, or would not, advertise his economic reforms, which he could legitimately claim

less Kesri said the better. The BJP, on the other hand, found that its two-point programme of mandir construction and an attack on minority-appeasement was still bringing in the voters. This was not surprising, because no one else had anything to offer in a time when strange, illogical coalitions held power in a vacuum. Lottery winners like Inder Gujral and H.D. Deve Gowda could hardly offer their individual good fortune as a platform for political mobilisation.

When Sonia Gandhi became leader of the Congress, there was genuine hope in the party that she would shape a new, and youthful dream over the layers of traditional Congress values like secularism and strong governance. It helped that she was not tainted by the devious manipulations that had characterised Congress policy over Ayodhya.

Instead, the only Sonia memory etched in the voter's mind from the elections of 1999 was a number, 272, uttered in an Italian accent. Sonia Gandhi became identified with a search for personal power. Everyone knew what power would bring to Sonia, but no one tried to explain what this would mean to the Indian.

Shopping centres of Dhaka

MAHBUB RAHMAN

I made several observations on an article on shopping facilities in Dhaka in your 'Urban Agenda' page (02.01.04). It was a timely publication on an issue that should have been the concern of designers and policy makers much earlier. Despite having more of an academic flavour, less of journalistic or popular orientation, it is full of inaccurate information; I shall cite only a few.

I am not sure I understand what "Hindu trading settlement" means. Pre-Mughal Dhaka was not spread between the river and the Dolai Khal, but in the east-west direction along the Buriganga. The khal was dug by Islam Khan by joining several existing water bodies. Nearly a dozen market places named as

pre-Mughal bazaars all indeed originated during the Mughal era. Producers of that period did not only have shops in the same area, but also within the same house. The Chawkbazaar area developed in the late-Mughal period was not necessarily the major shopping area.

The capital was transferred (not removed) in 1704 (not after 1757) to Murshidabad (not Calcutta). Dhaka was the centre of *Muslin* trading, but most factories were located in Kapasia-Narshingdi-Sonargaon belt.

Though the city expanded northward during the late-British period (Dilkusha and civil lines in Ramna), there was little expansion of commercial activities. It was rather more residential and administrative-institutional development. The first planned residential area came into being

in 1888. Planned-designated industrial developments were set up during the Pakistan period and those were separated from the main city till the 1970s.

New Market was probably not built in 1953, and certainly not following the Dhaka Master Plan, which was prepared in 1959. Its central garden was given up for further development in early 1980s. The Elephant Road (historically from Peelkhana to Begunbari Khal) is not yet mostly encroached by shopping, only that part in proximity to the New

Market started being transformed rapidly later than the 1960s.

"Eastern Plaza", the most dominating one with five (not three) shopping floors, certainly was not the first of its kind, but of course became the most popular and the most problematic (on the urban functions). However, transformation of Dhaka's contemporary skyline took place in several phases when mostly commercial spaces became scarce in Motijheel-Dilkusha in the 1980s, and new areas were

developed in Karwanbazaar, Banani, and Agargaon.

I am not sure whether it is the commercial demand (for more retail outlets), proximity/accessibility or the high return prospects (from selling) that motivate the developers, as empty places can still be found in the latest developments. The authors failed to identify the latest brand of emphatic developments along the peripheral roads of Dhanmondi, Panthapath, Gulshan Avenue, Uttara, Pragati Sarani and New Elephant Road.

They also failed to identify the Rifle Square, though architecturally less inspiring yet providing a newer vocabulary, and many other smaller joints popular to the new generation hangouts. These were results of not only the commercial value as mentioned above, but also diversification of the economy, new clientele, and conversion of previously residential areas into commercial streets by the Rajuk which in fact started in the early 1980s though Rajuk fluctuated between its policy changes.

I am not sure what local materials the authors had in mind, but we have a very few available in the country. Of course this is not a way of defending the heavy dependence on and inappropriate use of imported materials and mechanical means, often found offensive environmentally, economically and culturally. Yet, I would think that many of the new generation architects have shown a flurry of creativity in terms of form and use of materials and at least external beauty, if not in internal space organisation that is the first measure of good architecture. There are yet to come meg-centres like the Bashundhara city, which many apprehend would have a profound impact on both the urban functions and the architecture of the new millennium.

However, the authors have

correctly identified the drawbacks of these new developments, the list is endless. I am not sure whether the concerned people are bound by law to follow the Building Code (BNBC 1993) or whether Rajuk has a zoning policy as mentioned. I am also not in unison with all the economic and social concerns raised. However, I would agree with the suggestions, which were not enough unless you show how to implement those by overcoming all the negative forces. I shall hope that in a follow-up the authors would suggest the morphology of the kind of shopping areas they envision as to be culturally and ecologically correct.

Mahbub Rahman PhD is an architect-urban designer