

Taiwan's trade office in Dhaka



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BOTTOM LINE

The existing friendly relations between Bangladesh and China should not be allowed to be dented in any manner because of a reported decision allowing an unofficial trade office of Taiwan in Dhaka. China understands Bangladesh's commitment to "One China" policy and since China has allowed Taiwan's unofficial trade offices in other countries, it will hopefully adopt the same policy towards Bangladesh.

RECENTLY it is widely reported in media that the decision to allow the setting up of an unofficial trade representative office of Taiwan in Dhaka appears to have caused a diplomatic "hiccup" with the government of People's Republic of China (China). To me it should not arise at all because of Bangladesh's clear and principled policy towards China.

Bangladesh has been committed to "One China" policy from its birth. The commitment means that Taiwan is a renegade province of China and Bangladesh supports its unification with China. Bangladesh has consistently maintained its "Three No" policy to Taiwan -- No Two China, No independence and No representation in UN or other inter-governmental forums. Bangladesh never recognised Taiwan as an independent entity in any international forum, such as in Asian Development Bank. In recent days, Foreign Minister Morshed Khan reportedly reiterated this policy of Bangladesh towards Taiwan.

China is obviously very sensitive to Taiwan's strategy to broaden its participation in international community, in particular at a time when Taiwan's current President Chen Shui-bian has been causing irritation to China by holding a referendum together with the Presidential election on the status of Taiwan. Many observers have suggested that the holding of a referendum is an "election gimmick" and Taiwan has been warned by the US not to do anything that complicates its relations with China.

Let us make one thing very clear. The opening of an unofficial trade

office does not amount to diplomatic relations. Diplomatic relations have been defined in the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Article 2 of the Vienna Convention states that "the establishment of diplomatic relations between States...takes place by mutual consent".

It means that diplomatic relations may only take place between two sovereign States. States come into existence only through recognition. Bangladesh recognises only one China. Therefore the question of official or diplomatic relations with Taiwan does not arise through allowing an unofficial trade office in Dhaka.

Many countries, while maintaining diplomatic relations with China, still maintain unofficial relations with Taiwan to deal with commercial issues. For example, Taiwan under the name of "Chinese Taipei" maintains an unofficial "Trade Representative Office" in Britain. This has created no problem between China and Britain. It may be recalled that Taiwan participates in Olympic Games and other international sporting events under "Chinese Taipei".

Many countries' national airlines operate services to Taiwan using a different name. For instance, British Airways' subsidiary "British Asia Airways" flies to Taiwan. Australia does the same thing with Taiwan.

Trade office is a commercial entity and can be maintained through a private company of Taiwan in overseas. It may only work with private sector. The sensitive problem of issuing visa is ordinarily resolved through a mechanism as agreed. For instance, visa for foreign nationals is issued either on arrival in

Taiwan or visa for Taiwanese nationals by consular offices in nearest embassies.

Bangladesh's relations with China have steadily grown since China recognised Bangladesh in 1975. Bangladesh's relation with China has been one of the priorities of its foreign policy. Every head of Bangladesh government visited China to consolidate its relations. China has been a valuable partner to Bangladesh in its development activities. Bangladesh-China relationship is based on mutual respect and trust. The elements of engagement with China are directed to many sectors in the country.

Bangladesh is a Least Developed Country and has a massive challenge to improve the quality of life of its 135 million people. Trade is the principal way to engage itself with outsiders to

enhance its commercial activities. In fact China's one of the major investors is Taiwan.

The existing friendly relations between Bangladesh and China should not be allowed to be dented in any manner because of a reported decision allowing an unofficial trade office of Taiwan in Dhaka. China understands Bangladesh's commitment to "One China" policy and since China has allowed Taiwan's unofficial trade offices in other countries, it will hopefully adopt the same policy towards Bangladesh. The temporary diplomatic problem must be resolved in a spirit of mutual trust, understanding and accommodation between the two friendly states.

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Rising political unrest

Can hartal gain people's confidence?

ABMS ZAHUR

OMINOUS signs signaling unrest due to politics of confrontation, uncontrolled crimes, increased feeling of insecurity among people, particularly businessmen and professionals, are becoming pronounced day by day. Needless to say that in such a situation one may not see any good prospect for investment because the existing and the prospective investors (both local and foreign) are worried that the confrontational politics will aggravate further.

In our politics money and muscle are playing dominant role. Politicians look diminished, their minds congested by narrow interests instead of magnanimity. Politics is no longer synonymous with leadership. Any body can become a politician -- any body who has money. But such money mostly comes from unfair means and people who adopt unfair means do not have character. People who do not have character do not have prestige and the only way they can have authority is by unleashing muscle power -- terror. Three concrete things of so called modern politics appear to be corruption, crime and violence. Corruption leads to crime and crime, to violence.

The Awami League has started movement for toppling the four-party alliance government headed by Khaleda Zia. Their issues are mainly deteriorating law and order, corruption, high price of consumer goods and repressive measures taken by the government against the Awami League activists. Of these issues the deteriorating law and order and unprecedented price hike of essential commodities are the most sensitive ones. As regards the issue of law and order deterioration it is difficult for the common people to understand clearly as to which of the party should be blamed more. It is not possible for the Awami League to claim that all were well during their rule (1996-2001). In fact their failure in bringing the law and order situation under control cost them their power.

The people of Bangladesh are much more politically mature now as compared to the early seventies. Gone are the days of catchy slogans, sentimental appeals or sham oratory. Now the common people are not guided mainly by local leaders. It has been observed that the political strategy of constantly reminding the people of the role of Awami League in the liberation of Bangladesh could not bring the desired result. People actually look forward to solve their economic problem. They do not have too much time to spare to recapitulate the eventful days of 1971. It has to be admitted that though the vast majority of the people then were against the military regime's repression it would be not correct to assume that majority of them were sure about achieving independence so early. Furthermore, there were a considerable number of supporters of Muslim League who could not bear the pangs of separation from Pakistan because many of them claimed to have made substantial sacrifice for attaining Pakistan. Immediately after independence the opportunists among the Awami Leaguers started showing their true colour. Thus we saw the failure of Awami League administration and the loss of sympathy and support of the people for Awami League. Immediately after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib the possibility of splitting of Awami League due to internal dissension was saved by Sheikh Hasina.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was born out of the failure of Awami League. For the sake of establishing a party capable of facing the giant Awami League president Zia had to accommodate Islamic parties and anti liberation forces, himself being an active and eminent freedom fighter. In politics it is always compromise and adjustment. Thus many do not find any serious fault of Zia in his venture in the tricky and treacherous field of politics. After the assassination of Zia his party had a difficult period for a brief period. With no political experience Begum Zia assumed its leadership and turned it not only into a big party but also made it fully capable of challenging the biggest and the most experienced political party in Bangladesh, the Awami League.

The Awami League regime of 1996-2001 spared no pains to cripple the BNP so that it may no longer remain a challenging force. During the period AL concentrated almost all its attention to make the people believe that all credit for attaining independence should go to AL. Misguided and misdirected by sycophants Sheikh Hasina was under illusion that BNP would not be able to regain power within a foreseeable future. Instead of selecting projects for the benefit of the people in general more attention was paid for building up of Awami League's image. Instead of paying due attention on improving the administrative capability for the sake of good governance we saw politicisation of administration. This has faithfully been copied by BNP. And this has resulted in deterioration of law and order, increased corruption and inefficiency.

During the AL regime of 1996-2001 Sheikh Hasina made public announcement that AL would not call hartal even if the party remained in opposition. The then

leader of opposition failed to respond to the offer and as such hartal continued to remain as the weapon of the opposition. It is interesting to note that both these parties show similar temperament about the operation of parliamentary politics. The party in power does not allow the opposition to put up their demands in the parliament. Both lack tolerance. This is a serious impediment to the growth and development of parliamentary

Instead of resorting to negative politics like 'hartal' there can be public meetings where the common people can be informed about the faults, failures or omissions of the government. The opposition may even think about adopting noncooperation movement. The government must allow the opposition to point out their failures.

If parliamentary democracy has to flourish in Bangladesh the majority parties must learn the language

The basis of democracy is not maximum consensus. It is the tenuous middle ground between imposed uniformity and implacable hostility. The essence of democracy is the habit of dissension and conciliation over ever changing issues and amidst ever changing alignments. The sooner the two major parties agree to realise this truth the better for our political stability, peace and prosperity.

democracy in Bangladesh. Both the parties do not hesitate to opt for confrontational politics which leads to political unrest.

That hartal plays a critical role in achieving political power through reducing public support for the party in position is controversial. No doubt it can embarrass the government, no doubt it exposes the degree of failures and misdeeds of the government, but it certainly does not attract the voters towards the parties in opposition because hartals really hurt the people.

of politics. Majority of our politicians may not be aware of subtleties of politics. They also must learn the norms of behaviour inside the parliament. It is unfortunate that a behaviours and speech of some of our law makers verged on vulgarity inside the parliament. Needless to say that use of filthy language by any honourable member of parliament on the spur of the moment does certainly not improve his/her image or increase his/her popularity.

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tenuous middle ground between imposed uniformity and implacable hostility. The essence of democracy is the habit of dissension and conciliation over ever changing issues and amidst ever changing alignments. The sooner the two major parties agree to realise this truth the better for our political stability, peace and prosperity. The recent development towards creation of a new alliance headed by AL appears to have disturbed the government. It is to be seen whether the government likes to continue repressive actions against the opposition activists or chooses the path of negotiation to avoid the possibility of any extra constitutional development.

Our only hope is that in politics there is no last word. These parties, it is felt, will soon realise that confrontational politics is dangerous for a democratic regime. The opposition may choose for taking as much advantage from incumbency factor. The government should be careful about adopting repressive measures against the activists of opposition parties though they have overwhelming majority in the parliament. A democratic government cannot operate like a dictatorial regime because democracy is dependent on the wish of the people. One of the contradictions of democracy is that people give their votes to the politicians but refuse to be led by them.

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