

Row over trade mission

It was avoidable

THE latest on Taiwanese trade office centred trouble-shooting can be summed up as follows: Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan while reiterating Dhaka's unwavering One-China Policy says Taipei can have trade with us but without any diplomatic ties.

Basically there are two points we would like to make on the issue: first, Bangladesh should have thought it through, or more precisely, gauged the probable reaction of China before letting the trade mission open with a controversial sign-board. Secondly, even China's known sensitivity over the issue has been exceeded in this case in what appears to us to be a reaction overkill.

Let's address the second point first, namely that of overreaction by China. There has been a long tradition of our relationship with Beijing. Even though in our Liberation War, China was not on our side, yet following the birth of Bangladesh, we decided to leave that memory behind still characteristically holding the country in high esteem for its commitments to Third World causes. Excellent ties came to be forged with Beijing and China's involvement in our infrastructural sector has been a matter of immense satisfaction to Bangladesh.

Given such a long track-record of cooperative bilateral relations, the reactions vented out by the Chinese ambassador while explaining his country's position, especially the language he used, left us shocked.

The essential thing to realise is: One-China policy is far too fundamental a matter to be confused with the opening of a Taiwanese trade office. Secondly, private sector is not the same thing as the state sector and *vice versa*.

Having said that, we have to add that some unexpected naivete has been shown by Bangladesh on this sensitive issue for China. We find it strange and baffling that the BOI chief did not deem it fit to consult the foreign ministry before allowing the Taiwanese to open their trade office. Even, if we accept, for the argument's sake, that he had the mandate to do so, his failure to comprehend that it could stir the hornet's nest reflects on his insensitivity about this particular international issue.

Indian cricketers in Pakistan

More than sporting history in making

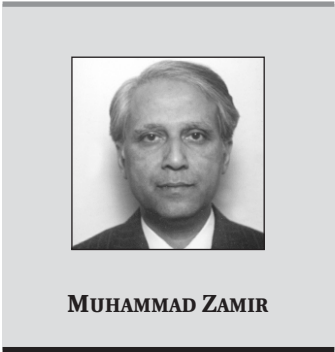
IT is of the stuff that truly great news is made. The resumption of cricket between Pakistan and India after 15 years in hibernation has hogged global headlines. Not for nothing. Though it's not the first time in the international arena that a sporting passion has triumphed over politics, yet there is something more to the restoration of bilateral cricket between the two countries: Cricket here is serving as a tool for thawing relations.

Nuclearised India and Pakistan have lately taken some dramatic steps to come to terms with each other. Overtures that were regarded as unimaginable only a year ago have been made by the two countries. We are not going to make a short shrift of this change of moods and hearts by looking at it as an upshot of pressures being exerted by the USA on them. For, such attitudinal changes can only come from a deeper self realisation of the grater stakes involved.

The highly elating resumption of cricketing combats between India and Pakistan has to be placed in the overall context of improving relations at the political level. So mutually endearing Islamabad and New Delhi are trying to become to each other can be gauged from their scrupulous avoidance of negative references. Even Pakistan's testing of a missile the other day was downplayed by the Indian media judging by past standards. Even opening of communication routes between Pakistan and India administered Kashmirs is said to be under study.

Let cricket played in its true spirit bring an impetus to a vitalising spirit between the two major South Asian players. The region will benefit immensely from it while the rest of the world heaves a sigh of relief over a normalisation of relations that saw three wars made in the last half a century.

US-Europe cooperation on global governance



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

THE contemporary world is facing today a general debate on the importance of increased and open dialogue on global governance. The UN General Secretary Kofi Annan has already called for reform of his institution and commissioned a high-level expert group to produce reform proposals. EU Commission President Romano Prodi and the EU's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana have also called for a strengthened, independent European voice in multilateral institutions and in global governance.

Nevertheless, despite this increasing consensus for positive change and sound global governance, there appears to be lingering differences in perspective and vision between the US and the EU. This is reflected in their respective emphasis on means for achieving such change.

Europe has already shown creative leadership in its approach towards global governance. It is pursuing innovative proposals on how to reach out to surrounding countries through individualised policy proposals outlined within its 'Wider Europe Neighbourhood' strategy. A policy of 'carrots' and 'sticks' in achieving positive domestic change is being undertaken there. The idea is to avoid interference in sovereign state

structures through military action. Instead, withdrawal of certain privileges, such as market access (a palpable carrot), is being put in place as a powerful catalyst for positive change.

George Soros, in his newest book, "The bubble of American supremacy", has outlined an interesting vision in how the US should conduct itself in international affairs. He explains that the US should lead the world in cooperative, pre-emptive action of constructive, non-military nature. Pre-emption,

Westphalia of 1648) and secondly, because sovereign states generally put their own interests ahead of common good.

Mr Soros believes that the 'international community' has to have the right to intervene in domestic politics in cases where a government is found to be oppressing its citizens or threatening basic human rights. He thinks that the key recipe to overcoming the stronghold of state sovereignty would be to offer strong, viable incentives, encouragement and alternatives for posi-

solve an international crisis.

Some analysts have suggested an interesting alternative. They have proposed the evolution of a situation where, instead of the USA alone, the EU assumes a greater role alongwith developing democracies and other larger democratic nations joined together in the UN General Assembly. They have pointed out that this will ensure sizable majorities who could coherently supervise international monitoring tasks without the stigma of unilateralism. In theory such a proposal

fringe to move back into the international community. Here, both Europe and the USA have already demonstrated the power of positive coercion. The stability and Association Agreements in Europe with its Eastern neighbours, and the individualised approach in the Wider Europe strategy (with the Copenhagen criteria) have paid dividends. Similarly, we have watched the recent developments in Libya with regard to the possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Like Europe, the US perspective

would not appear to be the sole dictator on the course. The power of underlying values and ethics could then be stressed even more.

In this context, it would be worthwhile to remember that a balance in approach between these two major actors would do the world a lot of good. There would be immediate fallouts in the global agenda -- reformation of the agricultural regime, increased trade facilitation measures and health policy. It would help global governance move forward.

Their efforts in this direction would probably be further facilitated, if they undertook a careful analysis with regard to their "absolutely inadequate" financial commitments in resolving the huge scale of global problems. There is need to globally recognise that we have an equity problem. We can applaud the US commitment to global AIDS funds, but this amount is a pittance when compared to the funds that are expected to be spent on maintaining a military presence in Iraq. That carries a \$160 billion price tag. What is required is a more equitable utilisation of global resources. Non-governmental actors and civil society might play a more meaningful role in this regard.

I believe that such collaboration will be most useful in accomplishing our common efforts with regard to combating terrorism, illegal human trafficking and promotion of law and order. It will also assist our common commitment and determination to live in peace, to strengthen human rights, to promote sustainable development and to improve environmental standards. We would all be better off by applying the principle of multilateralism rather than unilateral action.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

POST BREAKFAST

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according to him has to be redefined. This approach is not too far from Solana's European Security Strategy of effective multilateralism. In fact, Soros suggests that the EU needs to play a lead role and actively demonstrate that this kind of non-military pre-emption can be realistic and functional in helping to realise an equitable international system that would promote peace and prosperity for all, while simultaneously furthering other common interests like the environment.

The main stumbling block in the creation of common goals and cohesive action seems to lie with the principle of sovereignty. It creates a fundamental double-think: firstly, in the difficulty of intervening in the domestic policies of the state because of the 'sanctity' of the nation-state (which derives its political legitimacy for the largest part from the territorial definitions laid down in the Treaty of

peace change in that given country. According to him, the 'international community' has an inherent responsibility to act in these situations.

However, the matter is not so simple. The question that remains unresolved is -- who determines the objectivity of allegations before resorting to necessary and justifiable use of military force?

The consequent query relates to which authority should shoulder the responsibility for the decisions taken in each individual case.

Naturally, most of us believe that the UN should have the right for such decision-making. Recent developments have however shown that negotiations in the Security Council can often end in deadlock, as sovereign states pursue rival interests. Kosovo, probably was an exception where certain democratic countries acted together outside the UN established lines to

appears to be attractive and not inconsistent with stated US policy. The US is on record that it agrees with expanding collaboration between democracies in multilateral institutions such as the UN. It's representatives have indicated more than once in their interventions that a "caucus of democracies" is a useful and desirable concept, that fits well with the overall US policy goal of spreading democracy globally. It is pointed out regularly that the US is actively engaged in working with others to resolve problems in the world's crisis zones.

There is only one draw-back in such an option. Pragmatism would require the need to not only define an implementing mechanism but also its resource mobilisation technique.

The past months have shown that one should not underestimate the importance of "carrots" in persuading governments on the

on global governance is aimed at achieving sound global governance. The problem however seems to arise from the manner in which intractable issues are dealt with. What distinguishes the two approaches is the mixture of the carrot and the stick with regard to 'effective multilateralism.' This has been best exemplified in the tangible differences existing on issues from the Kyoto Protocol to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

What is probably required is change in the rhetoric on both sides and promotion of positive collaborative efforts. It would also probably help decision-making for both Europe as well as the USA (in the 'caucus of democracies') within the UN, if greater importance was attached to the opinion of the majority. Certain common values could then hold the groups together. The US could then very well be part of such a structure

Putin doing a high wire act to win the presidential election

A.H. JAFFOR ULLAH writes from New Orleans, USA

THERE is a whole lot of political acrobatics going on in Russia and Mr. Putin is the solo performer. Some of his actions have annoyed his opponents. They are wondering whether democracy will ever flourish in their country. One wonders whether authoritarianism runs deep in Mr. Putin's psyche. The West is perturbed by what they see coming in Russia. Is democracy has room to flourish in post-1991 Russia?

Figuratively speaking, the temperature is rising in Russia as presidential election nears. On March 14, 2004, Russians will cast their vote to elect their next president. Although half a dozen or so opposition politicians ranging from staunch nationalist to ultra liberalist candidate will compete to get the attention of the voters, Mr. Vladimir Putin, the incumbent president is expected to receive about 80 percent of the vote making him the next president of Russia. Mr. Putin is trying to look presidential and not participating in a national debate. However, the rest of the candidates participated in a televised debate. Never mind the news that one of the opposition candidates, Mr. Ivan Rybkin, was untraceable for five long days. When Mr. Rybkin returned from the "forced hibernation," he had a bizarre story to tell. Supposedly, some folks lured him to Ukraine with the assurance that he would meet one of the Chechen leaders. This turned out to be a hoax anyway. Mr. Rybkin was drugged and abducted to Ukraine. Looks as if the Russian underworld has the gumption of delving into politics. Who says Russian politics could be boring and dull?

Here I will try to put together some snippets of pre-election activities that are now filling both

online and print newspapers in the West. How is Mr. Putin campaigning these days? For some thoughts on this, let us review some recent breaking news.

Russia's top election official criticised on February 13, 2004, state television channels for giving too much coverage to Mr. Putin's campaign speech, while other candidates complained because they all thought the excessive air time had violated Russia's campaign rules. Rossiya and other television channels ran big chunks

career as a former agent of the Soviet KGB spy agency, gave encomiums to the former Soviet Union for being a world superpower but now he laments publicly the demise of the old empire. The robustness of his lamentation in the political setting has surprised many political observers in the West. Mr. Putin stated, "The break up of the Soviet Union is a national tragedy on an enormous scale," from which "only the elites and nationalists of the republics gained." He further said, "I think that ordinary citizens of the former

Putin launched his bid for re-election on February 12, saying he had ended "the time of uncertainty" in Russia ... He pledged to speed up reforms in his second four-year Kremlin term and lay the basis for a society with Western-style social institutions. Nonetheless, the one-sidedness of the campaign thus far had prompted fears among Russian liberals and in the West that democracy could be under threat in Russia.

of Putin's speech throughout the day in their news programmes. This is the reason several Putin rivals cried foul. The opposition party candidates had asserted that speech violated the election law and their rights as candidates. As per Russia's election law, all presidential candidates should have received equal access to television and other media and the law specifies that candidates must pay for any airtime they receive in addition to limited free slots allocated to them. It looks as if the federal channels have gone out of the way to promote Mr. Putin's candidacy.

One of the startling developments that had emanated from Mr. Putin's speech is his declaration that the demise of the Soviet Union was a "national tragedy on an enormous scale." This assertion of Mr. Putin appears to be his strongest-ever lament of the collapse of the Soviet empire. It can be added here that Putin, who made his

Soviet Union and the post-Soviet space gained nothing from this. On the contrary, people have faced a huge number of problems. Today we must look at the reality we live in. We cannot only look back and curse about this issue. We must look forward." Putin made this speech before 300 die-hard campaign workers gathered at Moscow State University. His language sent a chill through the 14 other former Soviet republics that are now independent countries for over a decade.

Mr. Putin in the past had to assure the former republics telling them that Russia had no desire to rebuild the old empire. Only months ago, when political problem surfaced in the neighbouring Georgia concerning the ouster of Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, we noticed how Russia was acting like a big brother. When the new leader of Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili, was making rapprochement with the Bush Administration, we saw

sion debates with the opposition party candidates or use the free television airtime. This bold move by Mr. Putin has reflected both his confidence of victory and the image he is cultivating amongst Russians as a strong leader who does not need conventional advertisements. Addressing the packed auditorium at Moscow State University, Putin quipped, "the head of state should not engage in self-advertising." "Nevertheless," he continued, "I am simply obliged before my voters and the entire country to account for what has been done during the past four years, and to tell people what I intend to do during the next four years" if elected.

As an incumbent, Mr. Putin is utilising the full usage of the state-run TV to get his message across. Therefore, Putin, like his predecessor Boris Yeltsin, has not been shy of using state resources in political campaigning. This has become a Russian style. Mr. Mikhail

It is very unfortunate that Russia's two main liberal parties, the most vocal advocates of reform, were all but wiped out in the November election. Mr. Putin knows that this is not good for democracy in Russia; he said he regretted their poor showing and pledged to make use of their most prominent members. As a gesture of goodwill, the pro-Kremlin bloc in parliament nominated two prominent liberal politicians to senior state posts on February 13. Mr. Vladimir Lukin, a former ambassador to Washington, was named human rights commissioner and Ms. Yelena Mizulina was appointed the parliament's member in the Constitutional Court.

Mr. Putin knew that he was being watched up close. Thus, he met German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, who told him of European concerns over Russia's record in observing freedom of speech, political transparency and pluralism. It is noteworthy that in

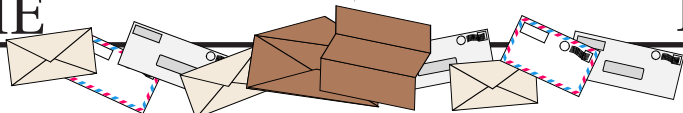
January 2004, Secretary of State Colin Powell made similar remarks in a newspaper interview.

There is some resentment among opposition politicians in Russia. Some of them had considered boycotting the presidential election, saying a fair vote was not possible in Russia today, and Mr. Putin's refusal to debate on February 12, 2004, reflected the candidates' anger at Mr. Putin's dominance of the campaign. Most ordinary Russians do not expect to see their president participating in the debate. Someone quipped that the head of state in Russia is like the czar who should not participate in discussions with those below him in the hierarchy. In the meantime, the Organisation for the Security and Cooperation (OSC) in Europe said the state-controlled media's parliamentary campaign coverage was slanted toward pro-Putin forces and accused the government of pressuring news media, to limit opposition views. This is not an outrageous comment because we have seen how Mr. Putin has dealt with two billionaire oligarchs who expressed their intention to help the president's opponents in the forthcoming election.

Mr. Putin was however nonchalant; he launched his bid for re-election on February 12, saying he had ended "the time of uncertainty" in Russia and promising a better life for millions yet to benefit from post-Soviet change. He pledged to speed up reforms in his second four-year Kremlin term and lay the basis for a society with Western-style social institutions. Nonetheless, the one-sidedness of the campaign thus far had prompted fears among Russian liberals and in the West that democracy could be under threat in Russia.

DrAH Jaffor Ullah is a researcher.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

RAJUK plots

I thank The Daily Star for publishing a news item on Gulshan-Banani plot allotment. The experience that I had while submitting an application for a plot of that project indicates that the DS report was absolutely true.

When I went to submit application for RAJUK residential plots for Gulshan-Banani area, I asked someone to show me the place where I could submit the application in Janata Bank, RAJUK branch. He showed me a queue. When my turn came, I found that the person was receiving applications for residential plots at Uttara. I asked him whether he would also receive the forms for Gulshan-Banani. He said, 'Yes'. So, I gave the form to him along with a pay order of Tk 3 lakh. However, the deposit slip that he gave me was showing that it was for Uttara. Later I found that the account number of the deposit slip was also for Uttara. I brought it to the notice of the bank officer who was receiving the applications. He became angry with me and said that it was not my duty to dictate him in

his work. Since it was a matter of a big amount of money, I drew his notice to the wrong account number. He gave me the application and told me to give it to the next table. The guy took the application and threw it into an open file cabinet. Being unsatisfied about the answer and the behaviour of the officers, I talked to another officer who gave me a hint that there was a directive from the top to avoid receiving applications for Gulshan-Banani plots from ordinary citizens.

My question is, if RAJUK has a pre-selected list of allottees then why does it collect this huge amount of money from people like us and drag them into a deception game? Who will compensate for the financial loss that every applicant will incur for keeping this huge amount of money in RAJUK's account for nothing?

I request the print and electronic media to keep an eye on the issue. **Imtiaz Ahmed**
One-mail

Current politics

Bangladesh became independent

33 years ago. In this long period has our living condition improved a little bit? When Bangladesh came into being the economic condition of our country and Malaysia was more or less the same. At present Malaysia is a developed country and we are languishing in the same or worse position. There are many things in common between Bangladesh and Malaysia. Then what is the cause that prevents us from having a better living condition? That is obviously our politics, our political leaders.

From the very beginning of our independence we have been watching the politics of might. One dictator came after another. This ended after a long struggle. Then we had the so-called democracy. We hoped for better days. But what we have been watching? Deterioration of law and order, widespread corruption, high cost of living and all other social ills. We have stood first three times consecutively in corruption! We have no security of our lives. Students and youths are getting frustrated.

What are our politicians thinking about it?

Mithun
Kabi Jasim Uddin Road, Kamalapur, Dhaka

Denial of freedom of speech

On Friday, 27 February there was a clear sign that freedom of speech is denied in this country. Professor Humayun Azad, a teacher of Bangla and a prominent writer, was stabbed. It seems the intellectuals have been targeted by the shameless terrorists in the country.

As a citizen I feel ashamed and terrified of this insanity. How can a nation which is a developing country and whose main priority is education afford an attack on a writer and teacher? Don't we have any respect for them? If we are living in a democracy then why did we attack professor Humayun Azad who is just trying to talk freely? "Denial of freedom of speech is a denial of what human being freely thinks."

I am a student of class 7 in a private educational institution. I went to school as usual on March 4. The school was closed because it

was on strike protesting against the attack on professor Humayun Azad. I felt proud of my school. I felt that it's really high time that all of us should become aware of this kind of heinous attacks on the teachers who give us knowledge, and this must be stopped.

Another thing that bothers me is that we attacked a Bangla writer and a Bangla professor just 12 days after the 52nd anniversary of the language movement and International Mother Language Day. What will people in other countries think of us? What will be their vision of us? Are we monsters? Are we devils? Are we blood thirsty villains? We are not. But some of us are! But we cannot let them rob the society of cultural, secular, democratic and of course peaceful values.

Professor Humayun Azad is fighting for his life. We wish him and his family the best.

Inshallah I hope we would live in a society of peaceful values where freedom of speech is the basic law.

Azan

Gulshan, Dhaka

Cursed English Department

We are the students of English Department, National University, of 01-02 session. We are following a four year integrated course. Now, in the second year, we have to deal with a language paper (ME-2002) of 100 marks. The university has provided a sample question for it.

But no books, practice papers and clear direction for preparation are available for it. Our teachers cannot say much about it because they also have a vague idea about it.

They do not take classes on this paper though seven months of the second year have already gone.

Now, what can we do? The overall result of students of the English Department is not good. So I request the authority concerned to provide books, practice papers, methods and train up the teachers, otherwise we will not be able to perform well in our final examination of Language Paper (ME-2002).

Mizanur Rahman

Mymansingh

Control the

price spiral

Prices of essential commodities have soared sky-high in the recent years in Bangladesh. Specially in the last one year of the government agencies have not been successful in arresting the sky-rocketing prices of essential commodities affecting the life of common people. The fixed income group is most affected. The traders, specially the importers, have formed syndicate to fleece the common people. Business ethics and morality is something we only talk about but never practice. Traders trade on the helplessness of the consumers whose rights are not protected by law in Bangladesh.

People often ask whether there is any agency which controls the price of essential goods. Its absence has exacerbated the plight of the common man in procuring essential commodities of life.

Globalisation is a good concept in international trade. But a poor, and ill-managed country like Bangladesh cannot hope to reap

benefits from it. Rather the unscrupulous trade syndicates play havoc with the lives of common people. Free economy can be successful only when there is god governance.

Government intervention in price control is a must in Bangladesh. Sector corporations like TCB, ADC, Petroleum Corporation must be strengthened to ensure steady supply of commodities like sugar, baby food, soybean, diesel, fertiliser, kerosene oil etc. etc. If there is any rise in price of onions, pulses, milk food or kerosene, the government should not wait for corrective measures from the private traders and importers. Rather the Sector Corporation concerned should import the specific goods immediately to ameliorate the sufferings of the common people.

The country's economy, especially the price of commodities, should not be left to the whims of the traders.

AKM Fazlul Haque

Banani, Dhaka