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China and Russia

I am writing with reference to the letter: "Sino-Russian military exercise," by Dr. Abdul Ruff Colachal (August 29).

Andrei Piontkovsky, Executive Director of the Centre for Strategic Studies in Moscow, recently wrote: "Last week, Russia and China held joint military manoeuvres in the presence of both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Hu Jintao. But a new strategic alliance between the two countries is not likely, as it is China that poses the greatest threat to Russia, although many in the Kremlin seem blind to this as they rattle sabers at America and the West."

Dr. Piontkovsky points out that China has territorial claims on Russia. China has a population of more than 1 billion while Russia, which is much bigger in size than China, has a small population of only about 150 million. In fact, vast Russian territories bordering China are extremely sparsely popu-

lated and China sees them as "vital space" for its expansion. He points out that on September 2006, China's People's Liberation Army conducted a large 10-day exercise, involving the Shenyang and Beijing military districts, the two most powerful of China's seven military districts. Shenyang abuts Russian Armed Force's Far Eastern District, and the Beijing District shares borders with Russia's Siberian Military District.

During the exercises, Shenyang units advanced 1,000 kilometers into the Beijing district, where they engaged in joint war games. According to most military observers, the Beijing/Shenyang exercises seemed to be practice for a possible offensive operation against Russia. As Piontkovsky writes: "The geography of the exercises, and the offensive nature of the task undertaken, leave little doubt that Russia was cast in the role of 'potential adversary.' Such a show of force is an

ancient, traditional Chinese political technique."

Andrei Piontkovsky concludes: "And China is succeeding, most importantly reinforcing Putin's anti-American and anti-Western agenda. While Beijing/Shenyang exercise should have indicated to Russian leaders that China's intentions towards Russia may not always be benign, Russia's political and military leadership seem not to sense any threat; on the contrary, they continue to sell the Chinese advanced weapons. ... Thirty-six years ago, Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong turned world politics upside down, as both America and China realised that it was the Soviet Union, and not each other, that posed the greater threat. Vladimir Putin needs his own 'Nixon moment.' Alienating the West is a foolish strategy when the greatest long-term threat to Russia comes from the East."

Mahmood Elahi
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The divide

I had the opportunity to witness the first ever Martial Law in Pakistan imposed by General Ayub Khan in October 1958.

I have also witnessed the Martial Law imposed by General Ziaur Rahman and General HM Ershad in Bangladesh. Pardon me for not mentioning the Martial Law government of Gen. Yahya Khan! The most common and significant point of all these Martial Law governments was that they did not disturb or antagonise the business community of the country. On the contrary, the business communities were encouraged to come forward with their grievances and were redressed to make the economy vibrant in whatever scale possible at that period. These generals who had come to power by virtue of imposing Martial Law probably realised that poor economy was the cause of all ills in the nation. So they went all out to rejuvenate the economy rather than parceling it to doldrums. Even in the last fifteen years of so called democracy the private sector and the business community played a big role in keeping the economy afloat and vibrant despite inflation. During this period, industrialisation in private sector made a great leap forward in sectors like edible oil, sugar, cement, steel, textile, pharmaceuticals, agro and plastic products.

Nowhere I have ever seen or heard businessmen being antagonised en masse. This is where a great divide has been created by the present interim government. It has been reported that in the import sector the traders of essential commodities are scared to open L/C fearing harassment and illogical questioning by banks and taxation departments.

Hence the nation is now feeling the pinch.

It is okay to prosecute neo businessmen who had become rich overnight by extortion, blackmailing, land grabbing, hoarding, adulteration, etc, but putting industrialists into jail and closing down their industries where hundreds of people are employed is not on. A businessman's heart and soul is money. He could be fined according to his business status, be it for tax evasion or wrong wealth declaration, but putting him in jail and compelling him to close his industry is not the right decision.

A poor country like Bangladesh cannot afford this.

In politics also a great divide is visible. The government is not interested to sit down with politicians and thrash out any misunderstanding that may have developed. The government is least interested

to heed the public mood or opinions. We only see journalists and television crews hovering around the interim government advisors. In the case of the recent turmoil at Dhaka University, the government could have sat down with the Vice Chancellor and teachers of the university and chalk out a peaceful solution to bring back a congenial atmosphere to the campus.

Ziauddin Ahmed

On e-mail

Patriotism vs. vandalism

I agree with the letter writers on the above mentioned topic (The Daily Star, August 24). I, too, feel that if there was any real patriotism (not just in words) in us as a nation, we could never condone such rampant violence and destruction of public and private property that took place throughout the country, whatever the provocation might be. Admittedly, the incident involving the students and the army personnel at DU was regrettable, however that does not justify going on the rampage and burning vehicles and causing damage.

As Shahlin Hossain has pointed out, the jubilation on the faces of the "protesters" (clearly seen on TV screens) as they systematically carried out their destructive activities, was, to say the least, unnerving! Is this what we, as a nation, have become: savage?

In this respect, the media has a role to play. The print media has not once spoken out against or condemned such acts of mindless violence, though it is quick to point out the flaws of the present government. Mr. Tarique Hoque is right when he says that the country's media seems incapable of providing encouragement to the present CTG.

Rashna H Rahman

On e-mail

Office hours during Ramadan

I note that the government of Bangladesh has announced that office hours for government and semi-government institutions during the month of Ramadan will be from 9:30 am to 3:30 pm with a 15 minute break at 1:00pm for Zohr prayers. Clearly, this arrangement is meant for Muslims, especially those choosing to fast. Since there are some 20 million non-Muslims in the country, many of whom are employed in government and semi-government offices on equal footing with Muslims, one wonders how would they abide by the new hours. The new hours are surely unfair to them. The 15 minute

Stranded Pakistanis

The question of whether to grant the stranded Pakistanis legal rights as citizens of Bangladesh should not be viewed from a legal standpoint, but rather on humanitarian grounds. I am glad that the administration is looking into the matter and I am hopeful that they will have some iota of compassion to influence their decision making

process.

The history of the stranded Pakistanis is a well known one. Most of them do not want to be Bangladeshis, but yet Pakistan is not willing to take them back. We should accept them as our equals. The deplorable condition that the stranded Pakistanis find themselves in is unacceptable.

I have not forgotten what

happened in 1971, nor do I deny the role most of them played in the war, but it is time to forgive. They have suffered enough.

I beg the administration to give them every right that we as citizens of Bangladesh enjoy. Please give them citizenship.

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THESTRANDEDPAKISTANIS.COM

ing are the few important ones:

1. Dhaka being the centre of all economic activities, the eastern part of Bangladesh is better connected with the capital than the other part. Until the Jamuna Bridge was commissioned, the river Jamuna kept the people of North Bengal separated from Dhaka.

2. Chittagong being the biggest seaport of the country most of the business communities grew around this port city.

3. Due to closure of all mills and factories around Khulna area, the Port of Mongla lost its business and the economy of the hinterland suffered.

4. Lack of availability of gas in the western part of the country.

5. Most of the flood-prone areas of Bangladesh lie on the Western Part (Nilphamari, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Sirajganj, Faridpur, etc etc)

6. Lower literacy rate and non-

availability of quality education.

7. Little access to bank loan/financial assistance.

8. Difficulty in marketing agricultural products, especially the perishable ones.

9. Lack of prominent leaders from these areas and less representation in decision making bodies.

10. Decline in jute cultivation and closure of jute mills as the western part was the jute producing area.

The reactivation of Mongla Port, building Padma Bridge, border trade with India and supply of gas will improve the present backward economic conditions of the Western part of Bangladesh. Dividing the country into separate provinces thus decentralising decision making may also narrow the gap.

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