Dhaka, Wednesday, February 5, 1992

A Signal to Myanmar

The Jatiya Sangsad has done well in sending a strong signal to Myanmar underscoring the country's anger and resentment over Yangon's continued persecution of Rohingya refugees as well as of its deliberate acts of provocation along the Bangladesh border. There was also a broad unanimity running through all sections of the parliament that the situation of the Myanmar-Bangladesh frontier was serious, and that it might get worse if the military junta in Yangon failed to respond to peaceful overtures of Dhaka in a convincing manner. Seen from this perspective, the debate at the Sangsad on Monday served a most useful purpose. If the authorities in Yangon were looking for signs of division in the country or some indications of weaknesses in the position of Bangladesh, they were surely disappointed.

However, as it happens in a parliamentary debate in a democratic country, speakers from different parties looked at the situation from varied angles and viewpoints which, by and large, have a bearing on the overall scenario.

For one thing, many members rightly expressed their strong support for the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar and called upon the Bangladesh Government to support the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, the imprisoned Myanmar leader. There were also allegations of interference from outside — one opposition member mentioned Rabita by name — which threatens to turn a volatile situation into an explosive one.

The response of Foreign Minister ASM Mustafizur Rahman to the debate was largely based on the country's commitment to a peaceful solution of its problems with Myanmar, but that, as he put it, the government would remain firm in protecting the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bangladesh. At this stage, the position taken by Mr Rahman is the only one that makes sense, which involves the rejection of such options as internationalisation of the issue, confrontation and war. However, since the junta in Yangon pursues all its plans in total secrecy, in dealing with its internal situation as well as with the insurgency on its borders. Dhaka may not be in total control of all its present and future options. We cannot also overlook the possibility this is what places the Foreign Minister in a defensive position — that the authorities here may not have all the facts at their disposal, such as the number of refugees, the nature and type of possible interference from third countries and the treatment of Rohingyas who have returned home by the Myanmar authorities.

We are in agreement with the government's policy of pursuing the present course of peaceful negotiation. However, we must ensure that our policy is not mistaken for weakness and that, unwittingly or otherwise, we are not dragged into the game plan of any third country. On the other hand, while maintaining our dialogue with Yangon for peaceful resolution of the border problem, we should leave no doubt in anyone's mind that we are for a democratic change in Myanmar, a change that not only brings a popularly elected party to power but also allows thousands of refugees, now sheltered in this country, to return to their homes in safety, security and with honour.

Ali Baba's Cave in the **Philippines**

Where exactly did Ferdinand E Marcos, the late dictator of the Philippines, get his millions (or was it billions?)? His opponents always maintained that the former president, who was driven out of power in 1986 through a combined assault of electoral defeat and people power, stole the fortune from the national treasury. The government of Corazon Aquino repeatedly said the former president, who died in 1989 in his Hawaiian retreat, defrauded the nation to the tune of US\$ 10 billion or more during his 21-year rule.

For Imelda, now back home after six years of luxurious travelling and already aspiring to be the country's next president, money does not seem to be the, or even a, problem.

To return to the original question, the debate over the source of Imelda's fortune is refusing to die. Now, the former First Lady herself has thrown some badly needed light on the mystery. She said, according to an agency dispatch carried by this and other papers yesterday, that her husband made his fortune by selling the war booty of Japanese general Tomyuki Yamashita who had looted treasures from all over south-east Asia during World War II. Imelda declined - surprise, surprise-to say where the treasure was now located, or how much it was worth or indeed how her lucky husband came to stumble across this south-east

Asian version of Ali Baba's Cave in the first place. She did, however, say that Marcos did not declare this apparently inexhaustible source of unearned wealth to the income tax people because -and this is a killer - he was too embarrassed. Now, that is the real revelation. We, like most people on this planet, were not aware that Ferdinand E Marcos was capable of being embarrassed by anything, let alone a small matter of few pieces of war booty 'liberated' from a defeated Japanese general. Finders keepers, he might have told the tax people. But perhaps he realised that he was looting already looted booty and it wouldn't do his fledgling career as a future autocrat any good if he admitted to being a looter so easily.

Imelda is now in rather tricky position. She has, wittingly or unwittingly, admitted that her husband deceived the income tax authorities by not declaring the source of money which paid for all of her shoes and more. Mere mortals could go to prison for that, and have their ill-gotten fortune confiscated. What is going to happen to presidential candidate Imelda Marcos? After all, she is still living off the money on which she has not paid any tax whatsoever. It would indeed be poetic justice if Imelda's tale about Japanese loot can provide Aquino with the rope with which the Marcos legacy could finally be hanged.

Assam out of Troubled Spots

Saikia, the state chief mintster, and the 'boys' from the the state and ploughing little United Liberation Front of back. Leave us alone to make Asom (ULFA) at Guwahati. our own mess, an ULFA Mercifully, the settlement is spokesman said. "At least then within the ambit of the Indian we will blame ourselves, not constitution and does not go the centre." The economic beyond an economic package. package, backed by Saikia's Not wanting to rock the boat, undertaking to resign if it is the ULFA has deferred even not delivered on time, may the demands for lifting the ban assuage apprehensions on on it, the general amnesty and Assam's development. But it the army's withdrawal till the does not meet the ULFA agreement has been hammedemand for autonomy in the red out to the last detail. state's affairs. The right of selfdetermination means the right

of self-governance. The surrender of arms may begin towards the end of this month. The ULFA cadres are in the midst of discussing the process at district level committees. Nearly 30 per cent of militants are still resisting despite a joint statement by Arabinda Rajkhowa and Anup Chetia, the ULFA chairman and general secretary respectively, that there is no division in their ranks. Across the border in Bangladesh and Burma, there are some 150 boys', who are yet to be consulted, and Saikia has offered them safe next few days. passage for that purpose. But these are small matters, which will not materially affect the outcome. The key will be the

contents of the proposed economic package. Saikia deserves congratulations because he has pulled through the settlement single handed and he has not allowed the personal tragedy - the ULFA has killed his brother, sister-in-law and three other relatives - to cloud his judgement, However, he if not New Delhi, realises that this is probably the last chance in Assam. If the accord is not implemented this time, the nation may well face Assam's cessation from India. Over the years, the demand has got escalated after every agitation

HE Assam solution has been nearly sewn. This

is the impression I get

talking to Hiteshwar

The Assamese have increasingly believed that outsiders have sucked them dry, taking away tea, timber and oil from

IGHT months have pa-

and what was once a peaceful

expression is now a militant

movement.

doned and the establishment

Saikia is of little help on this point and he has conveyed ft to the ULFA leaders. But he has promised to take up with New Delhi the larger question of giving more powers to the state. It he could do so, he would have done more than all the chief ministers put together have attempted. Jyoti Basu, the West Bengal chief minister, whom I met in Calcutta, told me that he would pursue the matter with Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in the

Indeed, the complaint of most states is that the centre is monopolising authority and treating them as vassals. Even in small matters like the appointment of chief secretary in a state, prior consultations with New Delhi are necessary. Margaret Alva, union minister of state for personnel, upbraided the Sikkim government the other day for selecting a particular officer for the chief secretaryship without getting the central approval.

New Delhi does not seem to be affected by the buffets of changes in Europe or what was once the Soviet Union. The louder the demand for decentralisation, the more emphasis is laid on centralisation. Perhapa the Objectives Resolution, which the Constituent Assembly of India outlined in December 1946, could be

revived to reverse the process. According to the resolution, the states of the Indian federa-

tion were to 'retain the status of autonomous units" and were to "exercise all powers and functions of government, except such powers as are assigned to the Union." But the June 3, 1947 plan of the subcontinent's partition changed the view of the constitution framers completely. The idea of loose federation was aban-

tion of their demand for autonomy. In fact, Punjab and Kashmir might not have experienced militancy if the people had enjoyed autonomy in their own affairs. How to shift the emphasis from the strength of the centre to the strength of the units is the problem.

in the circumstances, it is difficult to comprehend the Bhartiya Janata Party's hostility

Between the Lines Kuldip Nayar

of a strong centre became the aim. This went against even the tradition laid down by the Government of India Act,

Were the country to go back to the Objectives Resolution, the ULFA in Assam, the militants in Punjab and, possibly, in Kashmir would find realisato Article 370, which stalls the automatic application of central laws to Jammu and Kashmir. The new trend is for the centre to shed power and transfer it to the units in a country. A broad swathe of opinion across India regards the efforts to finish even the fiction of autonomy that J and



K enjoys as a provocation.

The BJP's Ekta Yatra, which ended in a whimper in Srinagar the other day, has not helped the situation in the state. LK Advant, the BJP leader, had said repeatedly that a token rally to Kashmir was not acceptable because "tokenism" would upon the country's unity. Still, when the chips were down, it was only a rally of 40 odd people, a clear come down for the party which was talking in terms of leading lakhs of volunteers to Srinagar.

The BJP did something worse, proving beyond doubt that the militants called the shots in the valley. All the security forces - and Srinagar was under curfew for three consecutive days prior to the flag hoisting ceremony - could not ensure more than a token rally. The ultimatum by the militants had the necessary sanction because there was not a single soul on the streets of Srinagar that day. This also belief the government claim that a substantial number of militants had laid down their

One thing that comes out loud and clear from Kashmir and other areas of militancy is the lack of response to the exhortations that all must unite to defend India's integrity of "Bharat Mata ki Jai". The militants want to know how they will gain by staying within the union. Jyoti Basu was quite right when he said that the new generation did not know even about the national struggle, much less the high-faluting phrase of emotional unity.

For New Delhi emotional unity is expressed through things like Republic Day awards. And the way in which Bharat Ratna was awarded to India's national hero, Subas Chndra Bose, on the one hand and Padma Vibhushan to the practising politician of pro-Hindu BJP, Atal Behari Vajpayee, on the other shows that the centre has no sense of

matters, New Delhi is haphazard in the process of selecting the Republic Day awardees.

The process begins with a circular to all departments and ministries of the state and central governments to send their recommendations. The section officer of a particular department or ministry sifts out the names and prepares a list according to his or her preference. After the scrutiny by an officer, the recommendations are forwarded to the Home Ministry where the process begins all over again from the section officer upwards. The Home Minster, the Prime Minster and the President, in that order, can add names. There is no considered thinking and often a whim takes over as has happened in the

case of Subhas Chandra Bose.

West Bengal is rightly upset because the centre has tried to bring down the stature of Subhas Chandra Bose, whose contribution to India's independence, was no less than that of Mahatma Gandhil But Calcutta should blame PR Das Munshi, former union minister, who has been urging the centre to confer Bharat Ratna on Bose. Ratnakar Pandey, a Congress MP, who wanted Sonia Gandhi to be prime minister, is another person who has been repeatedly say ing in parliament that Bose and Maulana Azad should be given the award. When the President's notification was issued, the West Begal government was surprised to find Bose's name in it. So was his family, which has refused to accept the award.

As regards Maulana Azad, I recall that the Bharat Ratna was offered to him. But he declined it on the ground that it amounted to pinning the medal on oneself because, as he said, 'we are the ones who confer the awards." Such is the fate of awards which are supposed to bring about emotional unity. The problem with the rulers is that they are trying to effect unity through stunts and slogans and not by attending to the real problem of distributing power.

Hungry Roaming Soldiers Signal Danger for Angola

by Keith Somerville

ssed since the Angola accord was signed. To Angola is limping back to normal eight months after the peace accord between the ruling the relief of the people and the guarantor states - Portugal. MPLA and UNITA rebels. However, mutual suspicion coupled with the disruption and the US and the former Soviet economic chaos of 16 years of civil war still threaten the peace process. Multiparty elections Union — the ceasefire has held with only scattered, minor are due in September. If the development of political parties is a positive sign, reports violations. The country is Gemini News Service, differences over control of security forces signal danger.

gearing up for multiparty elections at the end of September. Dangers resulting from bitterness between the governing MPLA and Jonas Savimbi's rebel UNITA movement and the disruption and economic chaos created by 16 years of

civil war still threaten the peace process. The animosity was amply demonstrated in mid-January when the MPLA tried to con vene a conference of political

parties to discuss the transition to democracy. UNITA, suspecting that it was an attempt by President Jose Eduardo dos Santos to guide the development of multiparty politics along his chosen path, boycotted the conference. The boycott was condemned by the MPLA and by the myriad of small parties which have sprung up since the end of one-party rule. Most

of these parties attended. Critics of the government suspect that many of the miniparties are government creations, financed and advised by the MPLA.

UNITA feels that some have been set up by ex-civil servants or minor political figures tolerated by the MPLA. The MPLA hopes for support if the two main parties fail to win a majority of votes.

The Democracy Party of Angola, led by Prof Antonio

Neto, is one party though to have links with the government (the Professor was for many years the Angolan representative on Africa-wide law associations).

One small party seeking to offer an alternative to both UNITA and the MPLA is the Front for Democracy

Led by Claudio Silva. it is a gathering of technocrats. whose main aim is the rehabilitation and development of the economy. They claim that UNITA and the MPLA belong

-CABINDA

LUANDA,

Novo Redondo

Lobito C

Benguela

Lubango

Namibia

Huambo

Cuito

Cuanavale

Mavinga •

Jambao

to history and that it is time for the development of a new style of Angolan politics with the stress on construction rather than conflict.

If the development of political parties is a positive sign despite the distrust between government and former rebels - a more negative portent is developing on the military

Although there have been no obvious attempts to break the ceasefire, each side suspects the other of underhand

Zaire

moves to develop a position of military strength if democracy fatls or the vote goes the wrong way

The Minister of State for Inspection and State Control, Kundi Paiama, said in January that he had evidence that South Africa was smuggling arms into UNITA-Controlled

areas of Cunene province. South Africa says it has cut all military links with its former allies. But former military intelligence officer. Nico

Besson, is convinced that mili-

Jonas Savimbi (UNITA)

ernment in Pretoria, is helping UNITA militarily and politically (having had the experience of such activities during the runup to Namibian independence). UNITA strongly denies the

tary intelligence, with or with-

out the knowledge of the gov-

allegations. Its information secretary. Jorge Valentim claimed the government allegations were aimed at covering up its own violations of the peace agreement.

It says the government is letting thousands of its soldiers leave the assembly points established to contain all former combatants. Tens of thousands of government soldiers. UNITA claims, are roaming the countryside. The reports contain and element of

A member of the UN verification team. Francois Giuliani, says soldiers are deserting because of shortages of food at the camps and to protest against government failure to pay their salaries for three

On the coast road between Lobito and Luanda, 3,000 troops have blocked the road to protest against the lack of wages and poor living conditions in the camps.

The problem is not one of

Rather it is a result of administrative weaknesses in remote areas combined with lack of transport infrastructure and shortages of food. Deputy Foreign Minister Venancio da Moura admitted

the government deliberately

destabilising the accord.

in a telephone talk that soldiers were leaving the camps to seek food, but denied that tens of thousands of soldiers were involved. He added that most leaving the assembly points were only doing so temporarily.

His view was partially backed up by US deputy assistant secretary of state for African affairs Jeff Dawidow, who said he did not think the government wanted soldiers to leave the camps.

He doubted whether A would seriously endanger the peace process, but warned it was an ominous sign and that international organisations and Western European countries should be more active in helping the US and the UN in implementing the accords and supplying food and other aid to feed the demobilised troops and guerillas.

This is a vital need. Hungry. unpaid troops roaming the cuntryside will be seriously destabilising. If they start taking their guns with them armed robberies will result and the possibility of disastrous clashes with UNITA cannot be ruled out. The devil finds work for idle hand (and guns), not to mention empty pockets and bellies.

- GEMINI NEWS KEITH SOMERVILLE is a writer and broadcaster on African affairs.

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.

First copy of holy Quran

Sir, I am an humble researcher who tries his level best to traverse through the pages of history and bring to light the hidden or nearly-forgotten glories of Islam. In this humble effort to dive deep into the antiquity have I recently been confronted with a very crucial problem -finding out the first compiled edition of the holy Quran. I have left no stone unturned and perused many a treatise on this issue but have so far failed to trace the present location of that very precious and historic edi-

The holy Quran was first compiled in a complete volume by Zaid Ibn Sabit (RA), a widely respected amanuensis of the holy Prophet of Islam (SM). It was on the orders of Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA), the first Caliph of Islam, that Zaid Bin

Sabit took up the historical and arduous task of the comptlation of holy Quran in a single volume, The collection of the fragmented writings of the holy Quran started only six months after the demise of the holy Prophet (SM).

It was the martyrdom of a great number of Huffaz or memorizers of the holy Quran at the battle of Yemamah which prompted Hazrat Omar bin Khattab (RA) to advise the first Caliph of Islam to arrange compilation of the holy Quran into one single authentic volume. Zaid Ibn Sabit rose to the occasion, collected written fragments of all the Suras duly authenticated by the holy Prophet (SM) during his lifetime and compiled it in one single volume. The copy (Sahifa) thus made remained in the possession of Hazrat Abu Bakr (RA). After his death it was carefully preserved by Hazrat Omar himself. After the

latter's demise, it was passed on to the safe custody of Bibi Hassa (RA), one of the literate widows of the holy Prophet (SM) and daughter of Hazrat Omar. It was this historic edition on the basis of which official copies were made by Hazrat Usman (RA), the third Caliph of Islam.

Zambia

The decision to make copies of the original edition was taken by the third Caliph in response to the request of Huzaifa who had been fighting with the people of Syria in the conquest of Armenia and with the people of Iraq in Azerbaijan. Huzaifa was alarmed at the deviation in the modes of reading of the holy Quran and requested Hazrat Usman (RA) to take immediate necessary steps in this regard. Caliph Usman requested Bibi Hafsa to send him the original edition and promised to return it to her after necessary number of copies had been made. The same Zaid bin Sabit was entrusted with the sacred task of supervising the copying of the original edition. Zaid was ably helped by Abdullah bin Zubair, Sa'id ibn II-As and Abdul Rahman bin Haris bin Hisham (RA) - "Caliph Usman returned the original to Bibi Hafsa after required number of

copies had been made and

ordered all other copies or leaves on which the holy Quran was written to be burned."

President dos Santos

So far as this humble researcher knows, at least three such copies are still in existence in different parts of the world. One such copy was handed over to the Tashkentbased Muslim Board for Central Asia by Mikhael Gorbachev about two years ago. A photocopy of this was presented to Ayub Khan by Kosygin when the former went to USSR to sign the historic Tashkent Treaty with Lal Bahadur Shastri. A third copy can be found in Nationale Bibliotheque in France. According to many scholars, seven more copies made on the orders of Hazrat Usman can still be traced out in different museums/institutions of

the world. What this humble researcher has been trying to find out is the first one (Sahifa) compiled during the reign of Abu Bakr (RA). It has not unfortunately been possible to ascertain where it went and in whose custody was it preserved after the demise of Bibi

History testifies to the fact that the original Codex made on the orders of Caliph Usman was presented by the Turkish

authorities to Emperor William Il as per Versailles Treaty (P K Hitti in "History of the Arabs"). But this was not the original edition compiled by Zaid during Abu Bakr's Caliphate. It is also claimed that many an article of historical importance and religious sanctity were transferred to Constantinople by the Ottoman emperors. Sultan Selim in 1517 AD brought to Constantinople upon his return from the conquest of Egypt many sacred relics including Dhaka'ir Nabawiyah which included "such holy relics as the staff, seal, shoe, tooth and hair of holy Prophet (SM)," But none mentions specifically that historic original edition kept in the custody of Bibi Hafsa. The original volume compiled by Zaid bin Sabit occupies a very significant place in the annals of history.

I have written to many an institution and even approached personalities like King Fahd, Presidents Gorbachev and Ozal to help me locate the original edition. But nothing much has yet been achieved. What is more, I have been suffering badly from acute ocular problems. I would be grateful if any learned reader of your esteemed daily very kindly leads this humble researcher to an authentic publi-

cation which throws light upon the fate of the historic first edition of the holy Quran.

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"Timeless Calcutta"

Sir. As an arid reader of your newspaper, may I congratulate you on a successful first year of publication. The Friday magazine sec-

tion of January 31 contains many interesting articles but none gladdened me more than the article on Calcutta by Sabah Moyeen. As a Calcuttan I felt the writer has been perceptive in capturing the essential cosmopolitan character of the city. However, I hope the writer will not mind my pointing out that the great Moghul emperor Akbar died in 1605, almost a century before the foundations of the city of Calcutta, as we know it, was laid by the British. Secondly, the caption on the photograph should be perhaps Belur Math; St. Paul's Cathedral is architecturally neo-gothic in style.

Brinda Srinivasan Gulshan, Dhaka