

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 Tomiyuki Yamashita who had looted treasures from all over south-east Asia during World War II.

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.

THE Assam solution has been nearly sewn. This is the impression I get after talking to Hiteswar Saikia, the state chief minister, and the 'boys' from the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) at Guwahati.

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 Arabinid Rajkhowa and Anup Chetia, the ULFA chairman and general secretary respectively.

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.

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

Assam out of Troubled Spots

the state and ploughing little back. 'Leave us alone to make our own mess, an ULFA spokesman said. 'At least then we will blame ourselves, not the centre.' The economic package, backed by Saikia's undertaking to resign if it is not delivered on time, may assuage apprehensions on Assam's development.

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.

New Delhi does not seem to be affected by the buffets of changes in Europe or what was once the Soviet Union. The leader the demand for decentralisation, the more emphasis is laid on centralisation.

According to the resolution, the states of the Indian federation 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.'

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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, 1935.

Were the country to go back to the Objectives Resolution, the ULFA in Assam, the militants in Punjab and, possibly, in Kashmir would find realisation

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.

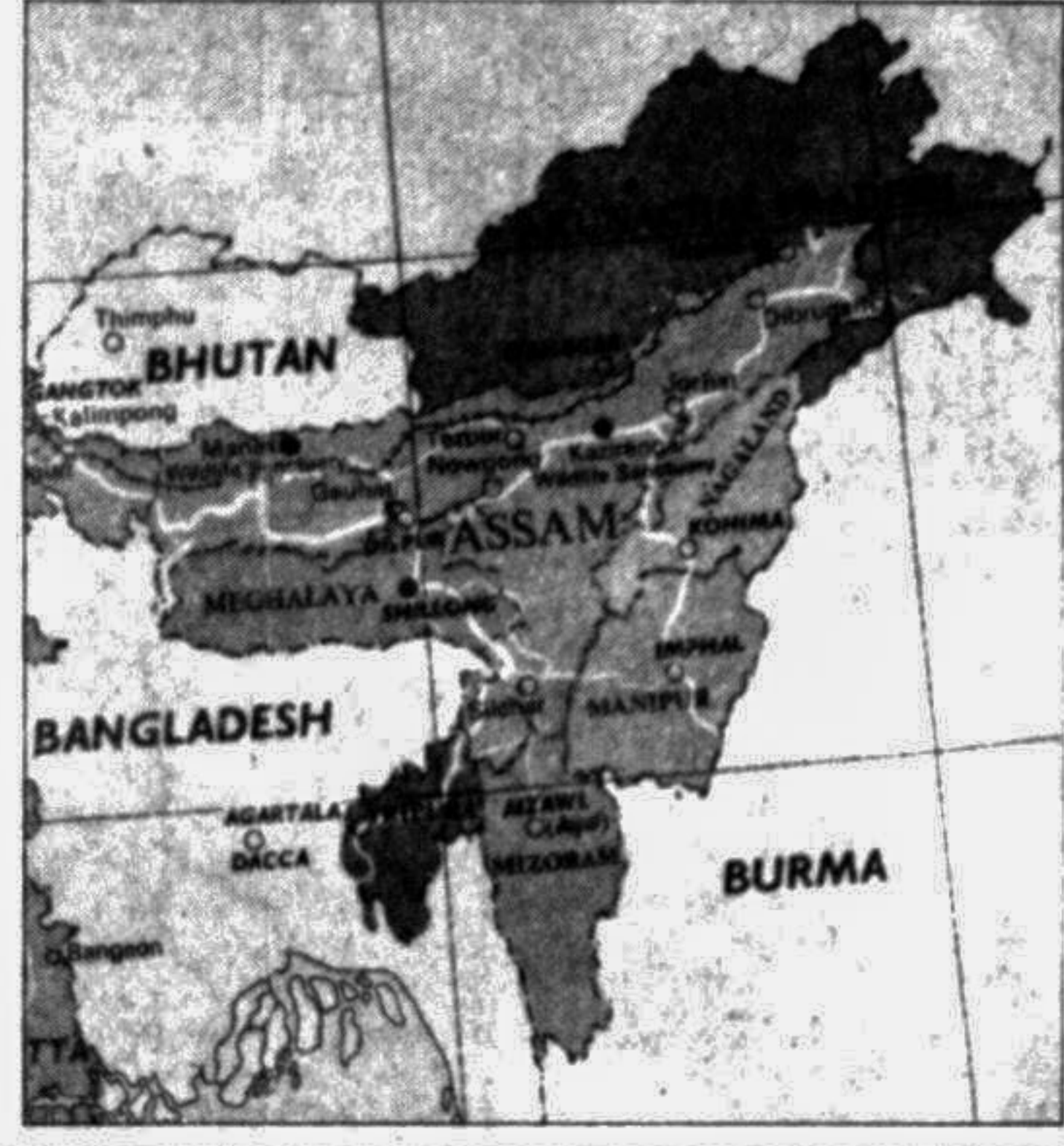
In the circumstances, it is difficult to comprehend the Bhartiya Janata Party's hostility

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.

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.

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.

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, Subhas Chandra 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



Hungry Roaming Soldiers Signal Danger for Angola

by Keith Somerville

EIGHT months have passed since the Angola accord was signed. To the relief of the people and the guarantor states—Portugal, the US and the former Soviet Union—the ceasefire has held with only scattered, minor violations.

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 convene 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.

Critics of the government suspect that many of the minor parties 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

Angola is limping back to normal eight months after the peace accord between the ruling MPLA and UNITA rebels. However, mutual suspicion coupled with the disruption and economic chaos of 16 years of civil war still threaten the peace process.

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

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 front.

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

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

The Minister of State for Inspection and State Control, Kundi Palama, 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-

tary intelligence, with or without the knowledge of the government in Pretoria, is helping UNITA militarily and politically (having had the experience of such activities during the run-up to Namibian independence).

UNITA strongly denies the 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 an element of truth.

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 years.

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

discrimination. As in other 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.

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 Gandhi.

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.'

He doubted whether it 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 guerrillas.

This is a vital need. Hungry, unpaid troops roaming the countryside 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

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To the Editor...

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 a 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 edition.

Sabit took up the historical and arduous task of the compilation 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 Yamamah which prompted Hazrat Umar 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 Umar himself. After the

latter's demise, it was passed on to the safe custody of Bibi Hafsa (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.

The decision to make copies of the original edition was taken by the third Caliph in response to the request of Huzafa who had been fighting with the people of Syria in the conquest of Armenia and with the people of Iraq in Azerbaijan. Huzafa 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 bin 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.'

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 Tashkent-based Muslim Board for Central Asia by Mikhael Gorbachev about two years ago. A photocopy of this was presented to Ayub Khan by Kossygn 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 Hafsa.

authorities to Emperor William II 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's 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 section of January 31 contains many interesting articles but none gladdened me more than the article on Calcutta by Sabah Moeen. 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