

## Why still a Non-starter?

After ten Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) signed with foreign companies and six months of the formation of a power cell does the prospect for Bangladesh power sector look any brighter? The answer to this question is a big NO. The reason is quite simple. Even in the past six months the cell that was supposed to have done the ground work for the MOUs to come into operation, could not itself get going. The fact is not many people are interested in joining the cell because of lack of monetary and other incentives.

That the cell has proved a non-starter appears to be nobody's concern. And this has been happening after the foreign companies have demonstrably evinced a keen interest in our power sector bedevilled since long by outdated plants, mismanagement and lack of investment. The state-run power sector has unsurprisingly drawn the flak of the World Bank. Now that the foreign companies have started showing their confidence in the potential of power generation in the private sector, there is no reason why we should fail to seize the opportunity. And look how very surmountable the cell-manning problem looks otherwise!

This appears to be an inadequate appreciation of the offers made to revitalise our power sector with foreign private capital input and the technology that goes with it. Reportedly the foreign companies who signed the MOUs are losing interest due to the inordinate delay in getting the act together on our side. We should feel the competitive urge with our neighbours such as India and Pakistan in attracting the foreign companies to our energy sector. The MOUs initiated for the generation of 2,000 mw of power involving around 2.50 billion US dollar have been no small an achievement. What we need is a vigorous attempt to present our case as convincingly as possible. To that end the required primary work has to be finished through activating the power cell in double quick time.

## Impressive Come-back

In the Russian elections the Communists have hit an impressive come-back. If not to power but to reckoning. This may discomfort many in the West, or conversely, hearten some in the East. In fact, there is no need for either. The Russian Communist Party is not aspiring for power through revolution — there will, in no case, be a copy-book Communist take-over. Their rise, as in Poland and elsewhere in East Europe, must of necessity be as meek as true democracy would demand with a thousand fetters latched on to state power. Both Kwasniewski and Zuyganov are tirelessly saying they are a thoroughly reformed lot. The latter has even said they are *New Communists*. Democratic values demand they be given a chance to prove their claim.

What is indeed disquieting is the way the heralds and angels of western-style democracy, first Walesa and now Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin are reacting to the neo-Communists' electoral success. They seem unable to show respect, even for form's sake, to people's verdict and have rather strongly slighted the Communist gains balking at their getting a rightful niche — in an expression of a very very undemocratic huff. Walesa has proved the more ungracious of the disappointed parties — so far. Let us hope the Yeltsins would be less so if only in order not to hurt their prospect in the all-too-important presidential polls six months hence.

The Russian Communists' have been a haul of vote cast from sheer suffering. The Yeltsin government and its western-backers blame the suffering on incomplete reforms. The Communists must be having other ideas about it. But they can hardly unsettle the on-going reforms at this stage — risking further pain to the hapless Russian people. One can only hope that the communist win — capable of only exerting a moral pressure rather than posing a challenge — will inject a sense of realism into the still amorphous Russian political situation rather than making it weirder.

## Caring for the Mind

Bangladesh can boast of some statistics fit even to bedeck the Guinness Book of Records. The 1:155,000 or one in more than one and a half lakh ratio of psychiatrists and mental patients could be one of them. It is easy to say for certain that the 54 specialists in mental diseases there are in Bangladesh have practice only in the big urban centres and treat only the truly affluent.

There is a growing stress of city life, and drug addicts are mostly town-dwellers. The towns as such are in need of the services of more and more psychiatrists. The need is evidently not being responded to by any increase in the number of doctors and hospitals exclusively treating the mentally afflicted. How about the situation in the villages?

Poverty and unemployment resulting in hunger and shelterlessness are at the root of mental disorder. Mental diseases perhaps do not count in rural Bangla because these are so much less of a problem compared to what their existence is threatened with. But this cannot be any excuse for leaving many of them to the *ojhas* and other brands of cheats.

A couple of years ago, the Bosnian Foreign Minister (now PM) Haris Siladzic, requested the Pakistani Prime Minister that while they were very grateful for the money being given as aid, they would rather have arms so that they (the Bosnians) could at least die with honour.

The Paris Peace Agreement provides for a NATO Implementation Force (IFOR) to oversee the fragile peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina, using force where necessary to do so. The Bosnian Muslims have a temporary reprieve at least for a year (the mandate period given to IFOR), one in which they can arm and train so as to be able to defend themselves. Given that the mandate is unlikely to be extended, it will be a race against time for the Muslims to be able to reach some level of credible deterrence.

The Peace Agreement amounts to swallowing "bitter medicine" (as per a direct quote of Bosnian President Izetbegovic) but it is a much-needed and welcome respite crafted for the Muslims by the US. The Accord essentially gives the Muslim-Croat Federation geographically 51% of the former territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Bosnian Serbs 49%.

While American public opinion has been overwhelmingly supportive of the long suffering Muslim population at the hands of the Serbs (and periodically the Croats), it has been decidedly wary about putting the lives of US soldiers on the line to remedy the situation. In the words of South Carolina Republican Rep Bob Inglis, "the best way to support (US) troops is to keep them out of harm's way."

For the past three years, Bosnian Muslims have been waging an unequal battle in their fight for survival. While the world imposed a total blockade on arms to any side in the conflict, the Bosnian Serbs have been getting constant aid from their Serbian allies of former Yugoslavia, particularly tanks, heavy weapons, munitions and fuel.

The Bosnian Muslims are mostly infantry with light arms interspersed with a few captured tanks and artillery pieces. The Bosnian Serbs were officered and manned for the most part by regular soldiers from the Serb Republic rotating "on leave". Ratko Mladic, the Butcher of Bosnia and an indicated war criminal, is a serving Serb

Army general sent by Milosevic.

The fact that President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia signed the peace accord on behalf of the Bosnian Serbs should clear any doubt as to the direct involvement.

As regards Croatia, having suffered sharp setbacks at the beginning of the conflict, Croatian President Tudjman was content to abandon considerable Croat territory to the Bosnian Serbs, confining himself to low-level material help to the Bosnian-Croats and grudging material support to the Bosnian Muslims while his army re-armed and trained, waiting for a better day to fight, at a time and place of their choosing.

The Muslims have been on the receiving end for most of the war, mainly from the Bosnian Serbs but occasionally by their Croat Allies, even being subjected to repeated aerial attacks in defiance of the no-fly ban supposedly enforced by the UN. To drive unrelenting terror into the hearts of the Muslim population, systematic loot and rape unheard of in recent European times have been indulged in by the Bosnian Serbs (and even the Croats) in addition to widespread arson and murder, the Serbs have revelled with sadistic pride and glee at their reputation.

In the final analysis, "ethnic cleansing" of entire areas has been carried out, driving the remaining Muslim population out of their centuries-old havens into a few confined so-called "safe" areas. A pre-dominant number of the dead have been Muslims, an inordinate majority of the rape victims have been Muslim women. US Satellite photos have revealed mass graves of Muslims who were held by the Bosnian Serbs after the fall of Srebrenica, their summary execution ostensibly ordered by Serb Gen Ratko Mladic, and Rado van Karadzic, the self-styled President of the rebel Bosnian Serbs with HQs at Pale.

Hardly had the horror of Srebrenica fully sunk in, than the Bosnian Serbs carried out another devastating mortar attack on Sarajevo. Finally

## The Bosnia Situation

# Race against Time

*For years former British Parliamentarian, Lord David Owen ensured that the Muslims would remain defenceless while he deliberately dawdled over so-called peace negotiations in a successful ploy to keep the rest of the world complacent about any urgency in the impossible and deteriorating situation for the Muslims.*

losing their patience, NATO gave a warning through the UN to the Bosnian Serbs to pull back their heavy weapons to a safe distance from the urban population. Used to such empty threats in the past, the Bosnian Serbs virtually laughed in NATO faces as they replied with more shelling. Armed with the UN go-ahead, NATO air power carried out widespread and sustained aerial raids targeting Bosnian Serb radar positions, artillery and tank emplacements, communications centers and munition dumps.

In keeping with the psychology of bullies through the ages, once the Bosnian Serbs were on the receiving end, the bluster lasted only for a

Balkan war, Serb President Milosevic welcomed the proposals of US negotiator Holbrooke towards a lasting peace. This led to literally quarantining of the leaders (in conflict) of former Yugoslavia at an US Air Force Base at Dayton, Ohio till the white smoke signalled an agreement.

Needless to say much arm-twisting and cajoling by the US went into this effort before the enemies sat down to ink their reluctant accord to the Accord. At the end of the Krajina onslaught that saw him emerge as a military power of some note in the Balkans, Croat President Tudjman visited London. At a dinner, he sketched out on a napkin for his admiring hosts

about any urgency in the impossible and deteriorating situation for the Muslims.

This Owen-act was one of deliberate betrayal that tilted the balance to the Bosnian Serbs, for their misplaced trust in the peace process the Bosnian Muslims got a wrenching knife in the back by this so-called gentleman who should be indicted as an accessory to the Serb war crimes.

The way the Paris Peace Accord is structured and the involvement of US troops, a necessary pre-requisite for NATO's European partners, makes the Accord a potent candidate for Murphy's Law, a disaster waiting to happen.

The sight of US soldiers returning from Lebanon and Somalia in body-bags on prime time TV has brought down the threshold of pain acceptable to the US public from the tens of thousands of lives lost in Viet Nam to single-digit figures. With US public opinion thus already anxious, there is very little margin for error.

Armed with this knowledge, the Bosnian Serbs have already started to drag their feet and give out warning signals despite the US resolve to react swiftly and in an overwhelming manner. The Bosnian Serb's so-called Parliament in Pale has already voted against the Accord. The Serbs know very well that they only have to focus their gun-sights on US soldiers to ensure that US domestic resolve collapses in a hurry. Some trigger-happy blood-thirsty contingent may already have been earmarked by Gen Mladic to carry out such an outrage. The resultant furor in the States for the troops to come home, would well make the US contingent fight their way out of the Bosnia cauldron, leaving the poor Muslims once again in an untenable position.

In a sense where the Bosnian Serbs used to hold a number of individual UN hostages tied to ammunition bunkers they have got the whole US contingent as hostage to vent their atrocities on. The nucleus of Pakistani support is already in Bosnia in the form of a Bri-

gade combat Group that must be expanded to provide adequate cover if the US ground troops should decide on a quick exit from Bosnia.

The best solution would have been to (1) let the Bosnian Muslims defend themselves as well as they have been doing for the past 3 years (2) keep NATO troops out of Bosnia (3) keep NATO air-strikes going against the Serbs (4) lift the ban on weapons to the Bosnian Muslims (5) train them to use the military hardware and (6) to establish proper communications and logistics facilities to ensure that supplies of all kind could be maintained by a safe land-route during hostilities. One of the major lessons of the past few months is that both the Serb military as well as the civil population cannot bear the brunt of military action on the level and type they have been doling out to the Muslims. In short the best defence against continuing Balkan conflict is to upgrade the quality of the Bosnian military machine in the same manner as for the Croatian Republic. After all, MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) is the US philosophy that kept the major Superpowers from engaging in a nuclear war for the past three decades or so. The level of deterrence must ensure Bosnian Muslims should be able to fight a two-front campaign, against the Serbs as well as the Croats, if required.

There is no shortage of brave men among the Bosnian Muslims, three years of battle has seen the emergence of a battle-hardened military leadership at all levels. However these are mostly infantry-neavy without the specialised skills of Armour, Artillery, Engineers, Signals, etc as well as the basic tenets of modern warfare.

Today, if Jaffna Town has been taken by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces after a methodical but tough campaign with great fanfare, much has been left unsaid about the training imparted to hundreds of Sri Lankans in Pakistani Armed Forces Basic and Specialised Schools of Training over the past decade. Almost 100% of the young Sri Lankan officers from Lieutenants to Majors have had the advantage of our fine training standards, both as cadets and officers. Pakistan could give the same facility to our Bosnian brethren.

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## AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

few days before they fell over themselves trying to comply with the UN demands. However, the Croat Republic had other ideas. Having armed and trained for nearly 2 years, mostly by US military training teams in the form of private companies, the Croats were waiting for such a moment, launching a lightning offensive that took back virtually all their lost territories.

With the pressure on the Bihać Enclave thus relieved, the Bosnian Army launched a major infantry-led offensive that had the Bosnian Serbs, already reeling, on the run. Within days the much-vaunted Serb military prowess was found to be fake, a psychological sleight of hand. They had been propounding their military might on the basis of their sheer brute force and a lopsided advantage in military armaments and supplies but in the face of determined onslaught by the predominantly Muslim Bosnian Army, the Serbs crumpled in spectacular fashion.

Facing military defeat on the battlefield in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a ruinous economic blockade of mainland Serbia and perhaps a greater

the map of the border as he envisaged the future between the Serb Republic and Croatia, effectively carving up the Muslim heartland between the Serbs and the Croats.

This is a damning piece of evidence as to the real Serb and Croat feeling. It is pertinent to note that the Muslims are his nominal allies in the on-going war and Tudjman has supposedly given cast-iron guarantees to safeguard this arrangement to remain allies. Of such perfidy has been the Bosnian-Muslim misery born!

Fighting against the Bosnian Serbs, in harness with an unreliable Croat ally who has his own designs on their territory, bereft of all international help for its defence because of an unequal ban on military supplies that only affects them, the Bosnian Muslims have been waging one of history's greatest wars for survival.

For years former British Parliamentarian, Lord David Owen ensured that the Muslims would remain defenceless while he deliberately dawdled over so-called peace negotiations in a successful ploy to keep the rest of the world complacent

# Desperate Ershad

*It was, indeed, obvious that relations, friends, advisers, and cronies who were party to many misdeeds of the President and thrived over the years would be equally fearful of their future. They knew what was going to happen to them once President Ershad is out of office.*

his cronies would also press him hard to strike back. I was mentally prepared for such move and was determined to dissuade him from such dangerous act. If he succeeded that would lead to serious consequences for the nation. In the last 12 hours we could manage to calm down the agitated people and bring them from street to drawing room. People of Bangladesh were expecting a change that would remove dictatorial rule of Gen Ershad. If the same people again heard the very word of ML or any change other than the proposed plan would return to the street with more fury and rage. Army would be their main target.

President Ershad continued discussion with me. He was repeatedly referring to the need for imposition of ML. I was trying to convince him that ML would only add fuel to fire and lead to serious violence. None would be able to control the general public who were already charged with fury and vengeance. I firmly expressed my apprehension that he might find Army officers and troops disobeying his orders and refusing to face the demonstrating public. I reminded him of the 25th March '71 situation where Pakistanis could use their troops easily, even then the end result was simply devastating. But here the situation was different and the consequences would also be different but, maybe, no less devastating. At this point President asked, "Don't you think it would be better if we leave the country?" I said, "Why should you leave the country? If you leave the country now that will imply that you are running away." I had to tell, "Do you want people should term you as coward? On this remark he kept quiet for sometime.

When our conversations continued for nearly an hour, Begum Ershad entered and took her seat on the sofa near

the window. She looked equally upset and pale, joined in the talk and asked me the same questions which her husband asked earlier — if they would be safe. I had to assure her again. Their main concern was safety and obviously banked on the Army. Though I was not at all in a position to assure them or make commitment of any kind but they needed consolation. I said they should have faith in Allah and seek His help. It was understandable that they were under terrible mental agony and fearful of an uncertain future. I tried to keep them calm and ease their strain. My main concern was how to dissuade and deter President Ershad from



## FALL OF GENERAL ERSHAD

by Maj Gen Manzoor Rashid Khan (Retd)

making any move to prolong his stay in power. I assured them of safety with whatever logic or point I could think of at that moment. However, I could make out that President Ershad's mind was set on imposing ML or make some arrangements that would ensure his position as President. He would do it under one pretext or other and would be looking for an opportune moment.

It was, indeed, obvious that relations, friends, advisers, and cronies who were party to many misdeeds of the President and thrived over the years would be equally fearful of their future. They knew what was going to happen to them once President Ershad is out of office. Only under ML umbrella they could extricate themselves to safety, at least for the time being. Therefore, what would be their advice was understandable. Begum Ershad suddenly asked me what Ershad asked me just few minutes back, "Should not it be

better if we leave the country?" Before I could reply, President replied, "No, I don't want to be a second grade citizen of other country, I shall not go anywhere." Begum Ershad started asking me many questions — what would happen if they stayed, would Army protect them, would they be allowed to stay in Senabhaban. It was difficult to comfort them and any attempt to ease their mind seemed fruitless. However, I continued showing my sympathy but explained that they would be facing many odds, there would be some hardship and might be humiliation as well. Under the circumstances these were the real probabilities. I advised

him, "I must talk to him". What President Ershad uttered startled me; I felt panicked within. I understood what these words meant and what was he up to. It showed he had made up his mind, would declare ML and was going to use Maj Gen Rafiq for this purpose. Through discussion with me he was probing my mind and exploring other options. He brought Gen Rafiq to Saver from Bogra just few months back when Gen Nooruddin was made Chief of Staff. It was a part of his overall personal defence plan. How close and trustful was Gen Rafiq to President Ershad was well known in the Army. Two formations of the Army located in and around Dhaka were always most important for the Presidents of Bangladesh since Gen Zia's time. These were 9 Infantry Division raised by Gen Ziaur Rahman during the early part of his reign and 46 Independent Infantry Brigade formed earlier after liberation. Most trusted and loyal generals and brigadiers were posted as commanders.

When Gen Ershad planned to oust President Satter, Maj Gen Abdur Rahman, an intimate friend and trusted general of Ershad was GOC of 9 Infantry Division and (then) Brig Rafiq was Commander of 46 Infantry Brigade. In the early stage of ML these two officers played a very useful part as field commanders for effective imposition of Ershad's dictatorship. Time had come for Gen Rafiq to show his loyalty. I was, of course, not sure how he would react in that situation. ADC could not get him immediately. That was a great relief for me because I was expecting to hear something devastating and awful right at that moment and it did not happen. I thought he would call him right away and ask him to deploy his troops either for declaring ML or, at least, to arrange for his protection. I

was looking for a pretext to leave. Every moment was precious for me. I had to leave Senabhaban before President could reach Gen Rafiq. In such situations time becomes one of the vital factors in shaping historic events. My foremost task was now to inform Chief of Army Staff or CGS what was being tried by the desperate President to remain in power. I instinctively felt myself insecure and helpless. I found some excuse and came out of his office and dashed for the car.

It was quarter past four in the evening when I reached my residence in Bangabhaban. Till then I had no contact with my wife or anyone of my family. They were happy to see me back home. Now my immediate job was to contact Gen Nooruddin, the Chief of Army Staff or Maj Gen Abdus Salam, CGS and warn them of the President's impending move. Gen Nooruddin was available on telephone. I told him, "President is looking for Gen Rafiq and you should understand what is he up to". I briefed him about my nearly three hours of discussion with President Ershad and his wife. I explained how eagerly he was looking for Rafiq and reminded of his admiration about Rafiq's loyalty to him. I was sure he had no doubt about Ershad's evil desires. Rafiq and ML were Ershad's last hope with one full night and part of a day left in his hand. He would be desperate to utilize this opportunity. The Chief of Staff thanked me for this vital information. He said that he was expecting such move but waiting for confirmation. As a precaution all troops under Rafiq were already returned to Saver. Incidentally, bulk of the 9 Infantry Division troops were concentrated at Shere-Banglanagar at that time. GOC himself was also temporarily stationed there. They were initially brought for Victory Day Parade but later kept standby for maintenance of law and order when anti-Ershad movement started.

Tomorrow: Ershad's Last Attempt