

## Repaying the Debt

Over the past 27 years, observance of Martyred Intellectuals' Day has come to mean different things to different people. For some, it is a day of grief; for many, it is a day of rage, when the emotions boil up at the thought of the genocide that was unleashed on the people of this land; for others, the day comes as another reminder that the perpetrators of the genocide have never been brought to justice; for the nation as a whole, it is a day of resolve, an occasion to take a renewed vow to establish the kind of society that these intellectuals dreamt of, the society that the Pakistanis and their fascist henchmen tried to snuff out through the killings of the intellectuals in December 1971.

The killings of the intellectuals exposed a heinous design that can only be compared to the Final Solution devised by Adolf Hitler for the Jewish people in Europe. The Pakistan army in Bangladesh, having lost the war, tried to obliterate the very soul of the emerging nation by killing as many of its finest sons and daughters as they could. These intellectuals had not taken up arms. Yet, they were carefully selected, picked up in the dead of night, and exterminated. Why? Because they represented the kind of liberal, secular, democratic ideology that the Pakistanis wanted to destroy through their genocide. The intellectuals gave their lives for their philosophy, their beliefs. It was the noblest kind of martyrdom.

The nation has gone through many trials and tribulations since those fateful nights 27 years ago. But the liberal vision that the martyrs projected has been blurred in post-independence Bangladesh. Two bouts of martial law have not only subverted democratic institutions, but also prepared the ground for the resurgence of intolerance and religious bigotry. The liberal and secular ideals espoused in the Constitution of 1972 have been undermined or thrown out. Freedom of expression and thought is curtailed through intimidation. Is this how the nation repays the debt owed to the martyrs? We would like to think not. While we observe the Day, we need to re-discover the liberal vision that once made the nation great, and establish a society steeped in the ideals of tolerance, secularism and democracy. That is how we can repay the debt owed to the martyrs.

## Airport Administration

Stories of passenger harassment at the Zia International Airport by organised gangs appear in the newspapers almost everyday but the one that has been published Sunday in this paper beats the imagination of even a day dreamer. The story unfolds the nefarious activities of a section of the employees engaged in loading and unloading of passenger luggage. There have been a thousand complaints in writing by passengers whose luggage had been tampered with and valuables spirited away — all within a distance of about 200 yards between the aircraft and the conveyor-belt unloading point.

The pilferage is done by an organised gang of loaders who are so powerful that they can beat up anyone who dares to catch them or interfere with their unlawful activities. The tentacles of the loaders' union can reach any place of authority and the connivance of a powerful mafia cannot be overruled. The report gives a graphic description of how such robbing and stealing happen on the apron as well as the customs enclosure under the nose of at least half a dozen security personnel belonging to powerful organisations like NSI and DFI in addition to Customs Intelligence, Civil Aviation Security, Airport Security and Special Branch. The powers of these important organisations for public safety and security seem to be of no consequence to the might and money of the thieves. Knowledgeable circles at the airport firmly believe that the inaction of the superior authority is causing tremendous hardship and harassment to the innocent travellers, both local and foreign. The situation at ZIA gives the impression that there is no administration and discipline at this important point of entry to Bangladesh.

We strongly demand of the concerned ministry to move swiftly to correct the wrongs, thereby restoring confidence and instilling a sense of relief in the minds of the travelling public.

## Ill-starred Clinton

Despite tendering another apology for his conduct in the Lewinsky affair — more contrite than the earlier one — US President Bill Clinton has failed to win a reprieve. Even his suggestion that he is ready to accept a censure motion could not come to his rescue.

The Republican-dominated House of Representatives Judiciary Committee has recommended impeachment proceedings on four counts: perjury, lying under oath, obstruction of justice and abuse of power. The voting has been purely partisan. And when the 435-member US House of Representatives has a fulsome debate on the motion next week towards sending the matter to the Senate for an impeachment trial the voting could be along party-lines again. This is predictable because the Republicans are in a majority at the House of Representatives and not expected to behave any differently from how they have acquitted of themselves so far.

However, to vote president Clinton out of office requires a majority in the Senate which the Republicans obviously do not have. In other words, Clinton looks rather set to get reprieve at the eleventh hour, but as a battle-scarred non-hero of sorts — out of the fry-pan somehow yet personally deeply atoning for that spell of playful trivialization of his high office, which shook the US.

Enough is enough. With the fate of the impeachment initiative more or less known, what is the point in inflating the volume of paper-work, especially when this could divide the US people, be an affront to popular will as reflected through a recent verdict tilting towards the Democrats, and hurt the Republican image with the public? We are voicing the sentiments of people throughout the world in urging the Republicans and Democrats to resurrect bipartisanship and put a speedy end to the leadership crisis.

# BJP's China Policy: A Grave Miscalculation

*Mr Vajpayee's threat perceptions on the eve of Pokhran explosion have been too crude to convince the international community — let alone the members of the elite nuclear club. The more he tried to harm China by teaming up with US the more China has gained — even from the US.*

visiting to China in December 1988 which laid the foundation for a structured and systematic process of normalisation by setting up a joint working group at foreign secretaries level in 1991. The First Trade Protocol was signed. In 1996 during the visit of President Jiang Zemin to India an Agreement on Confidence Building Measure in Military Field along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in India-China border areas was signed. The chief of General Staff of People's Liberation Army visited India in April this year in return of a first ever visit by the chief of Indian Army to China earlier. The trades were growing — in favour of India, and both the countries were again cooperating with each other in the United Nations. The steps led to the substantial easing of tension in the relationship and the wounds of 1962 were healing up after sustained efforts of two decades. The prospects looked bright that the two would again get together opening the possibility of correcting and balancing uni-superpower hegemony in future.

All these, however, received a severe blow with the accession of the BJP led coalition to power in India in March 1998. Within less than two months of its coming to power it carried out Pokhran II explosions declaring India a nuclear state. But before that as a prelude to its nuclear tests the BJP government started targeting, out of all, China as potential threat to the security of India as an excuse for her misadventure. Just on the eve of Pokhran II, the Defence Minister George Fernandes characterized China as potential threat No 1, accused China of being the 'mother' of Pakistan's Ghauri missile and, of intruding into Indian territory to build a heliport in Arunachal Pradesh. With such an ominous posture with regard to China the BJP government practically tore down the edifice of a foreign policy consensus for a friendly China —

painstakingly built up over the years. But the worst came after the tests when by way of a political follow up on the Pokhran explosion, the Vajpayee government chose again to target China as one of two threat factors as rationale for the tests. In a letter sent to President Clinton, Prime Minister Vajpayee explained at length his government's compulsion for going nuclear.

The letter was perhaps intended to be kept confidential but its recipient preferred to leak it to the press. Even if the rationale given in the letter for India to go nuclear was not much convincing to the US, China was from the content of the letter fully convinced that

relationship with China? What made her heap all the blame for insecurity only on China and Pakistan while sparing the US which also has nuclear armed base in India's proximity — Diego Garcia — and is one which actually threatened India by despatching its nuclear-equipped USS Enterprise in the Bay of Bengal in 1971?

The BJP's anti-China bias has to be traced in Sangh Parivar's mind set, its geostrategic thinking, and world view as well as its revanchist attitude on relation with China. As back as in 1965, RSS guru Ms Golwalkar characterised socialist China as 'one common enemy to humanity and looked forward to a superpower and global

(CTBT) and Fissile Material Cut off Treaty (FMCT). On the other hand China — shocked at India's uncalculated security allegations against her — remained remarkably composed. She burst out with a sharp reaction only when she knew that a complaint based on those allegations was lodged with the United States in Vajpayee's 12 May letter to President Clinton, made public next day in the US press.

But why Vajpayee did it? What was his calculation? He and his advisers perhaps assumed that the provocative letter to Clinton would earn him favour from the US. Mr Vajpayee, while writing such servile petition letter to the US President, could have thought that the US would be so pleased by India's implied desire to be a counterweight to China as to take India to its bosom and promote it all the way to nuclear club and permanent membership in the UN Security Council. Alas! Nothing of the sort happened. On the contrary the US had accused India of 'creating a dangerous new instability in the region' and termed it a 'very very negative development'. Clinton pointed an accusing finger at India even in foreign forums. He wanted India to accept unconditionally certain terms before he deigns to sanction it a fitness certificate. His principal advisers have, in an orchestrated chorus, prescribed 'dos and don'ts' for India.

How did the balancing of India with China in US scale go in recent time? Never before had the scale been so much in disfavor of India. Even at the height of the Cold War the US administration regarded good relations with India as an objective to be pursued in the long-term interests of the US. It is no more so with the balance increasingly tilting in favour of China. If the recent history of US-China relation is any guide, two state visits — one by Jiang Zemin in 1997 to the US and

another by Clinton to China in 1998, well after he received Vajpayee's letter — point to the depths and dimensions of their relationship to which US interests in India fade in insignificance. Apparently the US enamoured with China's mega market and China, hungry of western technology, do not want to lose each other. Of course, India will always remain in US calculus but not at the expense of China. But this plain truth seems to have eluded BJP's comprehension.

That is why Mr Vajpayee has been, till recently, chasing a mirage called Strobe Talbott, US Deputy Secretary of State. The onerous task is rested with Jaswant Singh, Vajpayee's potential External Affairs Minister who was sent to Washington presumably to reach the adverse reaction to the nuclear tests in the United States. It is in sharp contrasts to five other nuclear states who exploded bombs but advanced no explanation to others for their actions. Nevertheless, after Jaswant Singh, in a hot pursuit, stalked Talbott everywhere from Washington to Frankfurt to Delhi and huddled with him for highly publicised talks for as many as five times it was still not clear what the Indian emissary's mission had been about and what progress was made towards attaining those objectives. Only visible outcome has so far been the cancellation of President Clinton's visit to India. Also there seems to be significant shift in US stand on India's acceptance of CTBT. And on US relation with China, President Clinton has already hinted at the possibility of a country's strategic partnership with India after during his visit to Beijing.

Mr Vajpayee's threat perceptions on the eve of Pokhran explosion have been too crude to convince the international community — let alone the members of the elite nuclear club. The more he tried to harm China by teaming up with US the more China has gained — even from the US. BJP's gambit has been, at the best an oversimplification of international diplomacy.



## PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

India was trying to emerge as a counter weight to China with US patronage. The prayer like letter was fraught with oblique suggestions that India was ready to be considered as a counter-weight to China. After Pokhran II, China's reaction was mild as compared to that of the US and other western countries. As the letter of Mr Vajpayee was made public by publishing it in the New York Times, obviously China has progressively hardened its stand and, practically frozen any politically significant interaction with the Indian government. In the meantime the US whom the Vajpayee government has been trying to woo has transmitted no positive signal. While the years of efforts to normalise relation with China lie in waste, the BJP government's expectation to placate the US after the tests has apparently failed. Why did then BJP government put the clock back with regard to its

alliance to destroy it. The Hindu Rashtira ideology of the Parivar which heavily influences BJP's political agenda has traditionally seen China, along with Pakistan, in hostile term. The longstanding RSS project of giving an expansionist Hindu Rashtira a 'nuclear teeth' is indeed reflected in BJP government's threat perceptions mischievously propounded by its Defence Minister, George Fernandes. While the blatant China bashing may not be the matter of choice and policy on the part of BJP government what has however been incredible is BJP's highly compromising attitude towards the United States. This is in spite of the fact that US, in her right earnest, led a tough international campaign to take both economic and political measures against India in the wake of Pokhran explosion and is right now twisting India's arm to bring her to terms on Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

## The PM's US Visit

# Perception Versus Reality

*The sheen of the PM's US visit may not last through Ramadan if the prices of essentials go up as they are threatening to do. During the month of fasting tempers become frayed easily. One should learn from one's mistakes and try not to repeat the mistakes if another chance is given.*

seemed to hold his ground, compromised to an extent by bad media vibes, unleashed by forces that care too hoots about the national interest when compared to their own crass personal motivations.

The PM walked into the White House straitjacketed by handicaps. Pakistan is presently not in any position to credibly address three major US concerns viz. 1) nuclear non-proliferation 2) drugs smuggling and 3) terrorism, complicated by the lack of a sophisticated media and PR campaign in the corridors of US power centres in Washington.

That the PM was able to address these to receptive US understanding is good progress. After the May 28 blast which to a great extent was condoned by US and western powers as avoidable but an understandable gut reaction to the Indian nuclear blasts earlier that month, Pakistan had a unique chance of immediately going the high road by making known its intention about CTBT. At that time the powers that be accepted the fact that Pakistan was justified in reacting to Indian nuclear initiative in order to counter the security advantage. The CTBT signing when it comes will put India under pressure.

However, this is presently only a bargaining chip. In the meantime the economic situation worsened and we came under severe foreign exchange

pressure. The scales tilted against Pakistan as we lurched from crisis to crisis, not the least being inter-Province imbalance and the introduction of Shariah Bill (CA-15) in the National Assembly. In the circumstances our only hope for a favourable US posture seemed to be if we would compromise on various issues, especially on nuclear non-proliferation.

and terrorism.

Though there is no doubt about Clinton's genuine enthusiasm to help Pakistan, it will take considerable effort in the US Congress both by the US Govt and the Pakistan lobby to ease the laws to allow Pakistan some leeway. The good news is that there is now an objective move in this direction. The US knows that any government in

orating law and order situation in Karachi but three of the Provinces are being gradually estranged from Punjab and that is a very serious long term problem. The country is split on the issue of the Shariah Bill (CA-15) and more and more ad hoc solutions are being applied where treatment other than merely applying band aid and hoping for the best is necessary. On the military front, a lack of funds means that the constant modernisation required to upkeep a modern defence force is now lacking, particularly for the Air Force where we are outnumbered by the Indian Air Force, even if our Air Force pilots managed to equal the balance somewhat by their superior training and motivation. As such the very fact that after many years we are going to get our money back, \$ 350 million in cash out of US contingency funds for out of court settlement called 'Judgement Funds' and possibly \$ 151 million in form of wheat, the balance \$ 157 million (of the \$ 658 million) already having been paid in instalments.

Mian Nawaz Sharif walked in (and out) of the Oval Office exuding the confidence of an incurable optimist despite being served in Washington by pompous self-serving egocentric Ambassador Riaz Khokhar, absorbed in his own importance having no feel for the real-politik of Washington. The media gave out that the

US and Pakistan remained at cross purposes, this is blatant disinformation. As articulated by Information Minister Mushahid Hussain, the US set of security concerns differs much from ours, as such our approach to issues may be different. The results of this visit may not be on display in the next few weeks or months either but there was enough tilt in it towards Pakistan for the Indians to yell blue murder. They were not happy about the initiatives taken by the US President to lift some economic restraints. Diplomatically one can count it as a success, because of controversy over the size of the delegation and bad media management it became a PR disaster. Foreign Policy seems to have finally come out of the '50-60s closet, we are not straitjacketed anymore by the gnomes of yester-years inhabiting the Foreign Office.

Back at home a long list of problems awaited the Prime Minister. As much as he may wish that these problems should have gone away during his visit abroad, reality awaited him. The Opposition is up an arms and become more coherent and credible by the day. With our money situation bleak, friend and foe alike are asking, where's the moolah? The sheen of the PM's US visit may not last through Ramadan if the prices of essentials go up as they are threatening to do. During the month of fasting tempers become frayed easily. One should learn from one's mistakes and try not to repeat the mistakes if another chance is given. The country is living on a thin edge and the loss of expectations can easily turn this peaceful land into a cauldron. Perception then may well become a reality!

## AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

It is quite apparent that over the space of several telephone calls a personal chemistry had developed between the PM and the US President. Bill Clinton is shackled by various US laws in helping out countries having suspicion of nuclear intention capabilities. In our case, US Congress ostracism is more focused (and unfair), there being the country-specific Pressler Amendment which has been used against Pakistan for the last 8 to 9 years. Furthermore there are other US laws which do not confine themselves only to nuclear non-proliferation (like the Glenn Amendment) but extend to areas of drug smuggling

Pakistan has to contend with a powerful military and conservative lobby in Pakistan and Mian Nawaz Sharif (or anyone else for that matter) could not survive a compromise on security issues.

As far as Pakistan's expectations are concerned we had a whole list of problems, in some of which we expected some succour from the only Superpower left in the world. To begin with were the sear pressure on our Foreign Exchange Reserves and looming default thereof. Externally we face an isolation in the region and the approbation of the western powers because of the Taliban. Internally we have moved to solve the deteri-

## To the Editor...

### Arsenic: What went wrong...

Sir, I would like to correct an inaccurate impression presented in your Dec. 11 Arsenic article, in which I am quoted. The story quotes me as saying that UNICEF is partially responsible for the situation. What I had said, however, is that there is a collective responsibility to address the challenge of arsenic contamination.

Secondly, speaking for UNICEF, it would be incorrect to state that donor agencies "never unveiled (...) the reality of poisoning millions of human beings through their aid and support". We have always strived to take action based on the available information. For more than two decades, UNICEF and others have been working with various partners to provide safe drinking water that prevented cholera and diarrhoeal epidemics and contributed to the sharp reduction in infant mortality. Now, in response to the arsenic problem, we are working seriously with many others to find new approaches and new solutions to ensure that families are safe from arsenic poisoning as well. These actions include more testing to accurately identify contaminated wells and to help prevent drinking contaminated water; identifying socially acceptable and affordable options that could be expanded rapidly; and informing people with correct and consistent safety messages that enable them to make informed choices about water consumption. The issue is technologically and operationally complex and demand-

ing in terms of affordable alternatives and community participation.

As the article rightly points out it is still "puzzling" as to precisely how arsenic contamination is caused, although researchers are narrowing down the possibilities. UNICEF is already engaged with all concerned partners to get a better understanding of the nature and extent of the arsenic problem and equally to accelerate action for increased access to drinking water, that is safe from both arsenic contamination and harmful pathogens that cause diarrhoea. Again, we all have a collective responsibility to look into future action to help the people of Bangladesh and I am sure we can count on the Daily Star to continue as an active partner in reporting on the problem and helping to educate children and families about the vital and continued need for arsenic-free and pathogen-free safe water.

Dr. Deepak Bajracharya  
Chief, Water and Environmental Sanitation Section  
UNICEF, Bangladesh

### Are they licensed to kill?

Sir, The photo news (DS 7.12.98) on Asma on the captioned subject is in reference. The DS and other dailies have earlier come up with the news of painful condition of Asma who is a victim of doctors' negligence. But it is regretting that nothing substantial is being done to help her out from her agonies. Will she die a painful death? It is a big question.

Abu Imran  
Dhaka.

### "Poor Doctors"

Sir, Here we go again, another rude letter (Poor Doctors, DS, Dec 10, 98). They seem to be more popular and therefore get printed promptly! Even if it is the only letter one ever wrote. Is the letters column meant for personal attacks, only to waste precious space and nothing

else? If one wants to criticise, he can do so in a constructive way.

Anyone who doesn't have a special knowledge is a layman. A doctor is a layman when it comes to engineering or computer science. What do you expect in it? Why should US readers be meant only by any remark, it is what the percentile of the whole population is, as the statistics say. If all the logic and facts given couldn't be understood, then what can a doctor do? See now, why he doesn't want to talk. It is often useless, they don't understand his language! But they do understand the language of the SWM where the whole article was written without even knowing what actually happened! Do you think it was fair that the whole blame was put on somebody without digging for facts and hearing out both sides? This is Bangladesh style of judgement. Anybody can get in the wrong end of this kind of justice, if we don't correct it soon.

Why should one go to a tea stall, he can always go to an equally qualified doctor, where he doesn't have to wait for 3 or 4 weeks to get an appointment, both the doctors will be happy then — the too-busy one and the less-busy one also! Can't the patients understand this simple fact that when one is too busy, he can't be so perfect; it is just not humanly possible! But still they will rush to those places, and blame the doctor for that!

Before talking about tax, check yourself out please. Didn't you hear that few people in India found one of their kidneys gone after they woke up from a drugged sleep, because transplants are common there

but not still, over here.

Well, when women are harassed so commonly in this country, why not in papers too! So that they will be afraid to be so eloquent next time. Therefore please, no more mudslinging.

Dr Sabrina G. Rashid  
Dhaka, Cantonment, Dhaka

### What's wrong in BD?

Sir, I am often baffled by the fact that out of the three countries of the subcontinent, it is only in Bangladesh that we find that the Father of the Nation is a disputed figure.

Mahatma M K Gandhi, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had one thing in common for each one of them was the leader of the political party which fought for the establishment of an independent state, each one of them was successful in achieving their struggle.

In India M K Gandhi survived barely five and half months after independence and the party that he led — Congress — ruled India for a substantial length of time and then in course of political development, a number of opposition parties came up with their distinctly different outlooks on national strategies but never for once anyone from any of the opposition parties questioned the status of Mahatma Gandhi as the Father of the Indian nation.

Likewise Jinnah who lived for 13 months after achieving independence led by the Muslim League which continued to rule

Pakistan for a number of years until the military take over and subsequently other political parties developed who were strongly opposed to Muslim League and took their rightful place in governing the country. Here, again, no political party either in government or in opposition ever questioned the undisputed status of Pakistan's Father of the Nation, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

It is in Bangladesh that we find a different scenario. Bangabandhu lived for just over three and half years after independence and here again similar political developments, military take over and so on took place just as they had been in Pakistan. But the big difference is that although in 1972 immediately after the independence, Bangabandhu was unanimously accepted as the Father of the Nation, we find that today we have opposition parties with their supporters who do not seem to accept Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the Father of the Nation.

What has gone wrong? To his people, Sheikh Mujib was just as popular and was just as loved as Mahatma Gandhi or Mohammad Ali Jinnah was by their respective followers. I cannot help thinking that the responsibility for this unfortunate situation with regard to the Father of our nation largely falls on Awami League. It is time that the leaders of Awami League should consider the various reasons over the years that have given rise to this situation instead of just blaming all the opposition parties.

M Mahmood  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka.