

Impetus to Bangladesh-Myanmar Relations

MYANMAR Foreign Minister U Aung Win's visit to Bangladesh has proved propitious in clearing the air of a vestigial misgiving on the Rohingya repatriation question.

Even on the rather thorny issue of repatriation of the residual 21000 Rohingya refugees, the Myanmar minister may not have sounded in their abilities to expand and diversify their ties and immensely profit thereby in not too distant a future.

We as an advocate for an eastward bent to our foreign policy directions because of our being a bride-head between South Asia and South-east Asia favour pro-active relationship with Myanmar to begin with.

Industrial Safety

THE fact that industrial and occupational safety has been, and still is, a low priority with the government itself explains the marked rise of industrial accidents in recent times.

Ideally, the CIFEQ under the Ministry of Labour and Manpower, whose approval is a prerequisite for establishment of any industrial unit, should be able to detect any structural irregularity in the proposed lay-out.

So far, not only the government, but also the civil society have treated the issue on a rather ad-hoc basis. Any industrial accident has only generated knee-jerk reactions like condemnation of and outcry against absence of safety measures which died down with the passage of time.

A Terrible Tragedy

JOHN F. Kennedy Jr plunged into the icy waters of the Atlantic Ocean on Friday near Cape Cod along with his wife Carolyn Bessette and her sister in a light Piper aircraft piloted by John himself.

A descendant of a highly successful Irish immigrant, John Jr. had stolen the limelight at the age of only three when his photograph saluting his father's coffin was splashed all over the world.

An elaborate charade is being played out. Pakistani forces are withdrawing from the LOC which Islamabad claims they never crossed!

But according to BBC and CNN documentaries, the 'mujaheddin' involved in Kargil are mainly Mirpuris from Pakistani Kashmir.

The charade in India is no better. New Delhi reached a compromise with Islamabad over 'withdrawal' with U.S. mediation.

In reality, going by reports in The Hindu and in the Pakistani media, there was a three-way agreement over withdrawal.

India also says there has been a ceasefire. What about the mutually agreed 'de-escalation'?

The Charade Over Kargil No "Secret Deal", Mr Vajpayee?

Pratul Bidwai writes from New Delhi

The BJP is whipping up nationalist-militarist hysteria around our jawans' sacrifices. This effort is fine-tuned to TV. The Kargil conflict is South Asia's first-ever TV war, to which manufactured, manipulated, images have been vital.

ing that troops won't fire at each other amounts to de facto ceasefire. How could Pakistani forces withdraw so smoothly, taking away their arms, without such an understanding?

A reconstruction of events shows this agreement was reached through a tripartite process, including an end-May Talbott-Jaswant meeting.

Gen Zinn's visit to Islamabad (June 25), Mr Gibson Lanpher's to Delhi (June 26), Mr Niaz Naik's secret visit here (July 7), and last but not least Pakistan's High Commissioner Mr Qazi's return here just before the DGMOS met on July 11 to hammer out an agreement.

Gen Zinn read the Riot Act to the Pakistani army. His visit was the turning point. Mr Naik told the BBC he came here trying to 'set a time-table' for withdrawal through friendly, 'honesty talks'.

round and even earlier. What they may not have known was that these men were capable of going to the extent of storming the Supreme Court of the land to save themselves from being adjudged.

In rapid succession Nawaz Sharif pushed through his 13th and 14th constitutional amendments by which he converted himself into a supreme autocrat. The president was made a puppet, the power to appoint the service chiefs was his alone.

Having done sufficient wrong, his sense of self-preservation should perhaps have made him aware that he was riding a tiger from which he might fall and be eaten up.

On Monday evening, post-FM-speechtime, Mushahid Hussain rang to tell me the answer was Yes. To what, I asked.

with 'friendly' talks unless they are linked to an unequal deal. India's talks were indeed so linked. More, they violated Mr Vajpayee's categorical assurance to the June 28 all-party meeting on Kargil that there would be no 'secret deals'.

This breach of trust is part of the BJP's politics of ambivalence, half-denial and deceit, exemplified at its worst by the Babri demolition.

Mr Vajpayee delights in ambiguity. Like Mr Jaswant Singh, he contemplated quitting the BJP after the Babri demolition.

Even on the outrageous demand that Dilip Kumar return the Nishan-e-Imtiaz, Mr Vajpayee told him the 'choice' was

his. But the issue is not personal 'choice'. It is freedom and the fundamental right of military not to be intimidated.

The BJP is whipping up nationalist-militarist hysteria around our jawans' sacrifices. This effort is fine-tuned to TV. The Kargil conflict is South Asia's first-ever TV war, to which manufactured, manipulated, images have been vital.

Kargil's television served to create 'martyrs'. Our previous wars too saw thousands of deaths. But we never had spectacles centrally focused on coffins placed on a high platform, as part of an elaborate ritual with gun salutes and VIPS.

Besides being insensitive to the grief of the bereaved, such obsession with martyrdom does not speak of mature patriotism. It cherishes not caring and

sharing, but violence, conflict, brutality. It makes one forget that people become military heroes because they can kill. They are traitors to do so.

Such nationalism introduces a false distinction between 'us' and 'them'. Our 'boys are brave', 'dedicated', 'daredevils'. They are 'barbarians', 'huns', 'fanatics'. They kill 'indiscriminately'. We kill 'selectively'. They cause 'havoc'. We only cause 'collateral damage'.

Our military manoeuvres are clean. They are always 'sneaky'. We are 'principled'. They are 'cunning'. Our leaders (whom we otherwise despise) are 'responsible'. They are 'adventurists', prisoners of 'dark forces' (like ISI). Our borders are 'sacred'. They are ever-expanding. We are peaceful. They love blood. We believe in vasudhaiva kutumb-

bakam (universal brotherhood). They believe in Jehad. These stereotypes can be effectively inverted — as Pakistan's 'loyal' media did. There is a difference, though. India is an institutionalised democracy, with a tradition of freedom, dissent and pacifism.

India cannot feel proud at being so diminished. But the government and its 'force-multipliers' in the media have done just that!

Their exclusivist 'sacrifice' agenda can have no place for, say, Kanakamall, mother of Lt Col R. Vishwanath, who died in Kargil. Fighting back her grief, she still says Indians and Pakistanis should not be killing each other.

Jingoism is counter-productive even militarily. In Gen Patton's graphic words, 'no son-of-a-bitch has won a war by dying for his country; the trick is to make the other son-of-a-bitch die for his country'. The BJP is doing India a grave disservice through its cult of 'sacrifice'. We stand with.

End-game?

Ardeshir Cowasjee writes from Karachi

When Sharif realized that his miscalculation was likely to develop into an all-out war he retreated and sued for peace. That is the one right thing he did do — he did not compound his mistake.

round and even earlier. What they may not have known was that these men were capable of going to the extent of storming the Supreme Court of the land to save themselves from being adjudged.

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the sayings about Marie Antoinette and Nero, but you are witnessing reality.

India suspects that when Sharif received Vajpayee in February and made overtures to settle all differences through dialogue, the Kargil operation was already under way.

That the incursionists, Mujahideen, freedom fighters, patriots, defenders, zealots, or regular army (call them what you will) climbed the heights and entrenched themselves is a proven tactical feat.

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To the question asked in your last column, 'Has a lesson been learnt?' Surely that is not the purpose of your call, I said.

But, following from, the next day the PML parliamentary party voiced to the press Mushahid's description of Mian Sahib's decision: 'courageous, wise, sagacious, and far-sighted'.

The attorney-general, the first officer of the land, has also spoken up, but sensibly. On July 16, justifying the Washington communiqué, he stated that Pakistan is completely isolated and economically could not have sustained a full-fledged war.

As for our war-mongers and zealots, the uneducated and ignorant majority, they should be informed by the government in power that India makes a formidable foe. Its armed forces are twice the size of ours, making it impossible for us to sustain a military conflict. Econ-

omically, if reserves are anything to go by, India is forty times our size. It is of no use propagating the myth that one Pakistani soldier is equal in strength and courage to five Indian soldiers.

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Islamabad's recidivism has led some people in India to believe that unless Pakistan is punished severely for its aggression — and unless that punishment sinks into the consciousness of the Pakistani population — another aggression might be initiated a few years down the road.

There are ways of conveying to the people of Pakistan the pain and humiliation the rulers of that country have subjected them to for no rhyme or reason... An army which does

not acknowledge its own dead is not likely to keep up its morale as a fighting force. India should compile a detailed list of the identities of the Pakistani soldiers killed in action in Indian territory and publish it.

Our print and electronic media have been in the habit of families of the dead Pakistani soldiers may come to know about the fate of their loved ones felled in battle and whom their rulers have — to their eternal shame — disowned.

Already, sections of the Pakistani media are denouncing their rulers. With TV, Internet, satellite telephones and fax machines available to the Pakistani population, they cannot be deceived for long.

For the present, war clouds have receded, with our side admitting to the loss of 250 lives (do we double, treble or quadruple that figure to get to reality?), and with India admitting to the loss of around 2000 (which must also be multiplied), losses which we feel with equal grief.

Mian Sahib is satisfied with what he has achieved and is now taking off for Saudi Arabia on a thanksgiving pilgrimage to perform Umra. Ghouse Ali Shah and other PML acolytes have been asked to board a special flight to Islamabad, fly to Lahore to pick up their Leader plus family and friends, and then speed on to Jeddah. They are scheduled to return to the homeland, cleansed and blessed, on Wednesday.

OPINION

"Medical Ethics"

Dr. Omar Faruque Yusuf

After reading the DS report 'Negligence of professional duties' of June 23, and editorial 'Medical Ethics' of June 24, regarding the tragic and untimely death of Rubel's mother in a Dhaka city clinic allegedly of negligence on the part of clinicians and the clinic management, I feel compelled to write this first to offer my condolences on behalf of the surgical community to Rubel with words which are so hopelessly inadequate and must seem hollow but which are the only means of wishing that her soul rest in peace and for the Almighty to pour His divine calm on the bereaved family as only He can.

May I only say that not all the members of our community are the beasts that we are routinely portrayed to be. I know of doctors who have paused during operations to donate a bottle of life saving blood for a helplessly poor patient on the operating table in the middle of the night and then rejoin the operation. Others give freely from their pockets to provide medicines and materials for patients. Almost all surgical wards of the government, medical college hospitals, have a poor fund for patients which is run entirely from the contributions of the working doctors and this fund has saved countless patients not to mention supplementing operative costs. These are the true and unsung heroes of the medical community.

However, I agree with DS that the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council, which has become a toothless tiger, has failed miserably in its duty to maintain accountability and in the process has made a bewildering array of degrees, diplomas and training certificates from home and abroad without any standardization. This has led to a hot debate about the relative merits and demerits of the medical post graduate education system and has sharply divided the medical community with a horrendous amount of internal bickering. Sadly the partisan nature of the Bangladesh Medical Association has rendered it incapable

of upholding the interests of both the doctors and public in a neutral and befitting manner.

With the mushrooming of medical colleges in the private and public sectors the onus is on producing doctors quantitatively, thereby predictably compromising on quality leading to an overall reduction in the quality of our fresh doctors with the result that a significant quantity of Bangladeshi patients are now going abroad for even simple treatment with a huge drain on the country's foreign exchange reserves. Successive governments must also share the blame for this situation as they stressed on providing primary health care, restricting and discouraging doctors from going abroad by non-issuance of passports and demanding insurmountable immigration requirements with the result that we now have a nation of doctors in whom regrettably, the public seem to lack faith.

The few specialists that we have were the ones bold enough to risk the wrath of the establishment and train abroad, as also the ones who tried to make do with the best local facilities.

Medical scholarships given in the form of handouts by various governments only stressed upon non-clinical programmes like MS and Ph.D without providing the hands on training that our clinicians sorely needed to improve the increasing demands of specialties like cardiothoracic surgery, plastic and reconstructive surgery and transplant surgery to name a few. Adding to this, the poor quality of nursing and paramedical services only completes the nightmare scenario of a system which can only be corrected by a thorough and carefully thought about re-vamping of the whole medical health education and delivery system in light of the nation's requirements and resources available coupled with tightly controlled supervision.

The only can we hope to avoid tragic deaths like Rubel's mother.

The writer is Assistant Professor of Surgery and Member, Bangladesh Medical Association, Ctg. Branch

To the Editor...

Karnafuli bridge

Sir, In the '80s, General Ershad got an abandoned Dutch pier structure and installed it on the Karnafuli river to bridge the south and the rest part of Chittagong. It is named as Shah Suif Amanat (RA) Bridges (SAB).

A demand of a bridge on Karnafuli was made to Jinnah during his visit in 40s. General Ayub fitted a British pontoon bridge in the Chittagong Master Plan of Prime Port City in the '60s. But, the '70s cyclone and subsequent Liberation War decimated that bridge.

A visit to SAB would show how careless and negligent attention is given towards development of this prime port city of Bangladesh. Though Portuguese sailors termed it beauty Queen of East for its majestic in all respect, the British developed it as commercially important city, besides as prime port city of East Bengal an alternate of Calcutta (Comparison of Dhaka and Chittagong in the '40s would show), even Pakistan also developed closely infrastructure for Karachi and Chittagong. (Simultaneous building of steel mill, refinery, cement factory, educational institutions, Marine Academy etc.) but now all promised development plans are seemingly under bureaucratic erasures.

If we take the case of SAB, we will find, except SAB no other river bridge built after independence has a wooden floor. This wooden floor is not morticed, but is vibrated at intervals having a wide gap. That creates rattle and vibration as vehicle ply on it. Besides, no river bridge has speed-breakers on its main span. But, this SAB has as many as dozen on its main span.

Last but not the least, SAB does not have proper illumination, police security post and toll plaza. Make shift way of all these are collecting a higher rate of toll than on any other river bridge. Ironically, Bangladesh Communication Minister, Ex-CCC Mayor, Ex-treasurer of present ruling party, present CCC Mayor too use SAB frequently to visit their homes/areas, but yet they hardly murmured about the latest position of SAB. Planks are giving away due to deterioration wear and tear, gave-away-parts are miss-

ing creating death-trap-hazards for vehicles.

I would not know what engineering feat would be required to refurbish this bridge, named after a revered sufi with steel sheet cladding and high grade asphalt carpeting. I hope, the concerned would think about it seriously. SAB is the shortest road link for KAFCO, CUFK, Korean EPZ from port, railway and airport.

A R Choudhury Uttara, Dhaka

The beginning of the end?

Sir, When Dhaka riot police start rioting (blocking roads and indulging in violence, as reported in the press), it is an ominous sign for the administrators of the country. The police morale and moral have broken down — how to maintain law and order? There is no simple answer or solution, when nepotism is worshipped behind the altar.

More bad news: DU MA stu-

dents have attacked dean's office and caused damages. These educated younger generations, the future rulers of the country, who are going to be "Masters" in education in some specialised subject, have also taken resort to indiscipline and violence for the redress of their grievances. Why violence and indiscipline are so popular today? Are we headless people without brain? Where is the leadership for such social emergencies?

Some time back there came a news report that school students blocked roads as protest on some pretext. The pattern is the same, taking the law into their own hands, in the alleged absence of justice through proper channels of administration and justice. Why normal and standard channels of solving problems do not work in this decade of the millennium?

The problem of the society is the complete absence of tolerance. There is no sense of duty — only demand for 'rights'; all based on self-definition and self-assertion. The CBAs and labour unions have gone out of

control, and are available on hire for indulging in suspected activities for the vested interests. Everything is for sale — including the conscience. What are the limits of moral consciousness? Only the leaders of the society should respond to this loaded question; as the rest have 'ordinary' minds, and cannot contemplate. It is all 'fast food' and fast thinking; with faster damages and losses; first of the other parties; and then the boomerang (intrafractional honeymooning).

The government, represented by the regime in power, shies away from focusing attention on these basic malaise in the society. Those who are tainted cannot sit over judgement or bring about solutions. What is the basic root cause? Let us face it — The political misuse of power and influence. Before 1991 it was in different form, with less violence, indiscipline, less terrorism, less intolerance.

The cynics have one simple conclusion: hang 'democracy', and throw out the dirty politicians, and invent a hybrid form of governing in the LDCs, is imported versions do not work either; in Asia or in Africa. We need some genetic-engineered political culture in the underdeveloped and over exposed areas.

Atif Zabr Dhaka

200 out of 301

Sir, Afzaruddin Khan who is the younger brother of the first Prime Minister of Bangladesh Tajuddin Ahmed, as a State Minister of Works evicted people from the Bhasantek area. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina thought that either it was done illegally or by a misuse of power. So he was sacked. Now Works Minister Mosharraf Hossain illegally misusing the power with the help of some officials of the RAJUK had allocated 200 out of 301 plots in the name of the leaders and members of the ruling party Awami League including himself, ministers, members of parliament and their relatives. But Mosharraf Hossain remains as a minister, that too as Works Minister. Iqbal Ahmed Dhaka-1000

Fighting a losing battle?

Sir, Since arriving here on a holiday two weeks ago, I have been reading the DS your paper regularly, as it had been recommended by Bangladeshi friends as a neutral broadsheet. I would have agreed with that description until I read the Opinion column of Wednesday, 14 July 1999. Under the heading 'For the sake of healthy homes' Mr Abu Imran, the writer, presents some very reactionary arguments which, moreover, are not borne out by developments in Europe and America.

In this country only a very privileged minority of women can actually choose whether to stay at home or go out to work. The great majority have to work outside the home, or they and their families would simply starve. What is more, it has been proved beyond doubt that only by empowering women and enabling them to become economically independent will it be possible to reduce the birthrate which at the current rate, is expected to cause the population to double in another 25 years, or even sooner?

Nor are the examples the author cites in support of his argument at all convincing. When Audrey Hepburn retired from her acting career, she was a very wealthy woman who could afford not to work at that stage in her life. The experience of Abraham Lincoln's stepmother is even less relevant to today's problems in this country. In the other hand, one could list many examples of women throughout history who combined a successful career with a satisfactory family life. The suggestion that only women are good at looking after the family is ignoring the fact that increasing numbers of men are now involved in taking care of home and children.

In fact, if it continues, the non-involvement of the majority of men is likely to contribute more to the break-up of families than women being economically active outside the home. I think Abu Imran is in any case fighting a losing battle, as more and more women everywhere are claiming the right to be educated and to follow a career of their choice. Renee Mattheus Dhaka