

Stirring the Hornet's Nest

By Ekram Kabir

THE publication of the supplementary report of Hamoodur Rahman Commission (HRC) on August 11 — on the defeat of Pakistan in the 1971 war and the consequent emergence of Bangladesh — by *India Today Online*, has stirred the hornet's nest. While political observers and social activists in Pakistan are telling the army to learn from the contents of the report and stop meddling in civilian affairs, retired army top brasses, in their bid to defend themselves, are making out that the 1971 defeat was more on account of political blunders rather than failure of military strategy.

Regionally, especially in Pakistan, many have been surprised by the enormity of the report. Some even doubted whether the report was genuine. But *The Dawn* newspaper has confirmed it, quoting Maj. General Rao Farman Ali, who was one of the key players in 1971.

The government and the people of Pakistan are certainly embarrassed, and they are asking questions like: "was this done to embarrass the military regime of Pakistan?" Possibilities as such cannot be entirely ruled out, given the on-going wrestle in Indo-Pak relations. Pakistani government is trying to find out how the copy of the report fell into the hand of an Indian newspaper.

However, the publication of the HRC report, to a great extent, has affected the current set-up in that country and it is likely to cause a serious backlash on the state of affairs. It may make things tougher for Chief Executive Gen. Pervez Musharraf. For, it would again bring to the fore — and be criticised — that Pakistani army with its proven record of damage to democracy had usurped power in October 12, 1999.

The heat is already left. Kulsom Nawaz, wife of deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, has demanded action against those military personnel and civilians found guilty in the HRC report. She also said that had the report been published earlier, the Kargil incident would not have taken place. She, however, denied the allegation that Nawaz Sharif had handed over the report to India.

Moreover, common reaction in Pakistan does not bear well for the country's ex-generals and its present military regime, for it would be in political limbo, water for some time to come. A change in the attitude of intellectuals has taken place as some ex-generals who committed crimes against humanity. In this respect, the Joint Action Committee for Peoples Rights Lahore has demanded from the military government to formally seek apologies from the Bangladesh masses. The Bangladeshis are also enjoying all social facilities in 'independent Bangladesh'. The question is whether the government of Bangladesh would ask for a trial of these people. What are the pro-liberation activists, historians, legal practitioners, etc., going to do?

The time is, of course, very crucial, because it is believed that Bangladesh would enter into a new phase of bilateral relationship with Pakistan, with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina meeting Gen. Musharraf in New York on the fringes of the UN Millennium Summit. Foreign Secretary Shafi Sami has already visited Pakistan for talks with Musharraf. Given the situation, Bangladesh may hesitate to do something about the war criminals of 1971, because Islamabad has called for immediate convening of the Saarc summit, in which it would need Bangladesh's help. But in Pakistan's suggested expansion of Saarc charter to include political issues in its fold may open the doors for Bangladesh to discuss war-related issues with Pakistan.

It all depends on Bangladesh's willingness to try war criminals, including Razakars and Al-Badr who assisted the Pak army in every possible way and patronised anti-liberation activities. Innocent people suffered and got killed at their hands, for they directly took part in Pak army's killing spree and violations. It's time to bring to light as to why the collaborators were given a general amnesty by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after the liberation. Can a head of state simply forgive some killers like that? It's time that terms and conditions of the amnesty are made public. Legal scholars, with enormous amount of honesty and integrity, must come forward to analyse and help to single out criminals who went scot-free. For, the 'amnesty' without any doubt, helped these criminals to hide their colours. But they are still traceable.

No one should be afraid — as it is observed these days — of talking about taking actions against crimes committed 29 years ago. People, who feel strongly about it, should give up their submissive attitude. It's time Bangladesh asked itself some questions about what went wrong when the country needed to ostracise war criminals. The information in the HRC report will certainly help to draw a line between the wicked and the upright.

cal parties and military in Pakistan fed distorted facts to the people of Pakistan about their defeat in 1971 in the hands of Mukti Bahini and Indian army. Schoolbooks in Pakistan still teach that India conspired with Bengali secessionists to break up Pakistan. Now the HRC report reveals that it is the Pakistan's military that became corrupt and who through their actions had alienated Bengalis. This will certainly be very difficult to swallow for many Pakistanis who hold their army in high esteem and knew little about their actions in Bangladesh. They would now understand and probably feel ashamed for what their Generals and politicians did in Bangladesh.

The (supplementary) report is important for Bengalis, because in independent Bangladesh, no commission or body was ever formed to analyse the victory in 1971 and investigate the loss incurred by the people during the war. This is one area that post-independence governments in Bangladesh didn't, perhaps, felt too strongly about. They only churned out — they still do — sympathetic language to those who suffered immensely during the war. Rhetorics certainly are not enough for people who strongly felt about the war. They, though in minority, want their war-wounds to heal by at least punishing those who wronged in 1971.

The Pak military under the leadership of Yahya Khan and a number of senior officers devised an evil plan to quell the aspirations of Bengalis during 1971. Disastrous, as the HRC report calls it, would be too soft a word for what people in Bangladesh had gone through at that time. Ten million Bengalis lost their homes for the fear of losing their life. Three million were killed, which the report has denounced, at the hands of Pak army and their collaborators like Razakars, Al-Badr etc. But so far, not a single person has been tried (punished) for the crimes they committed in 1971.

The publication of HRC report, in this respect, has made Bangladesh's job easier, because the report would now be a ready evidence at any court of law. The report concluded that Pakistani military was responsible for the death and destruction in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh may not get the report officially from Pakistan, yet is there any reason for Bangladesh to sit idle with the findings of the report? There has to be a renewed interest on the issue of impunity as far as planners and executioners of the 1971 genocide are concerned. Some of the key players like Tikka Khan, Rao Farman Ali, Niazi and Gul Hassan are still alive in Pakistan. Their cohorts — Razakars and Al-Badr — in Bangladesh are also enjoying all social facilities in 'independent Bangladesh'. The question is whether the government of Bangladesh would ask for a trial of these people. What are the pro-liberation activists, historians, legal practitioners, etc., going to do?

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Nepal

The Rising Red Star

By Mansoor Mamoon

Is Nepal, the Himalayan Shangri La and once an abode of peace, is fast turning in to a battlefield? With the increase in the momentum of Maoist guerrilla strikes, this apprehension is agitating the minds of the analysts both inside and outside the lone Hindu kingdom. Even though they strongly adhere to Mao's philosophy and political ideals, particularly his strategy of People's War, Mao's country - China - maintains no links with them neither extends any material or moral support.

Insurgents belonging to the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) or NCPM headed by Puslipa Kamal Dahole are now virtually in full control of almost half of the territory of the country. They are reportedly active in 35 of a total of 75 districts. The presence of the central government or the administration of the capital city of Kathmandu in the vast area of the west-central mountainous region of the country has been largely negated by the red Maoists bands. All government developmental works have ceased and the Maoists have set up their own administration. They are also active in most parts of the country, apart from the districts they are now controlling.

The rise of the NCPM is, indeed, phenomenal. The party went underground and started what it called 'the people's war' in February 1996. Initially their weapons were the traditional Nepalese Kukri (knife) and hand-made guns. But gradually they acquired sophisticated weaponry from various clandestine sources as well as from their sudden swoop on police outposts. According to re-

ports they now have regular contact with various outlawed guerrilla groups in India and other countries. Their strength has now risen between five thousand to 7,000 active armed cadres with sympathisers and supporters reaching up to 20,000. In their fold there are also child warriors called the 'red devil' and their number is increasing which is indeed a disturbing factor. During about four years of the insurgency nearly 1600 people were killed (according to figures released by the government the death toll so far is one thousand). Another 1000 were reported to have sustained injuries. The government estimates that two-thirds of the casualties are among the Maoists guerrillas who, however, denies the government estimate and boasts of their own successes in innumerable strikes and encounters against mainly police personnel. The main demand of the NCPM is the abolishing of monarchy and turning Nepal into a republic.

Following the mass upsurge in 1990 parliamentary democracy was restored in Nepal and the King was made a titular head of the state. He no longer has any absolute authority. The king now only reign but does not rule. The parliament has the supreme power. Elections were held in 1991 under the caretaker government formed in April 1990. Prior to that the undemocratic and hated Panchayat system was done away with. Since the present King Birendra Bikram Shah Dev cannot act without the advice of the cabinet headed by his Prime Minister and Parliament the Maoists' movement against monarchy is said to be symbolic. They claim that their war is directed against feudal remnants and for freeing the

people from the shackles of exploitation epitomised by the monarchy. Anti-Indian sentiment is also very strong among the Maoists.

After the replacement of absolute monarchy with parliamentary democracy Nepal so far had three general elections and as many as nine governments. Squabbles and bickerings among politicians are rife contributing to highly volatile and murky situation with the tag of instability writ large in the body politics of the country. Corruption is reported to be rampant and income disparity is widening with the result that the poor are becoming poorer and the rich richer. In such a situation the guerrillas thrive and hence the Maoists are getting increasing support from the poor, deprived and exploited classes.

Restoration of parliamentary democracy has not in any way changed or improved their lots. With pent-up frustration they are extending support to the Maoists and also swelling their ranks. Twenty-five thousand strong police force of the country have failed to contain the insurgency. The government is planning to raise additional police force. Various international human rights organisations are complaining of police brutalities and atrocities. In police action, many Nepalese are said to be missing. Death in police custody is also frequently reported. The police has the sweeping power to arrest any suspect who may not have any trace later on.

The government has repeatedly offered olive branches to the guerrillas and invited them for talks. But the guerrillas remain as illusive as they had been in the past. The latest offer of talks and Maoists' agreement to participate have not as yet

materialised. The government is now undertaking large-scale development activities so as to improve the living condition and to provide employment opportunities to the unemployed youths so that they could not be lured by the Maoists. A plan is currently under way with an initial expenditure of nearly 1.5 million US dollars. But this is too paltry in view of widespread and endemic poverty in the country. Besides, corruption among implementing agencies might eat up the lion's share.

Other than seeking economic solution, the government is also contemplating to take more stringent action against insurgency short of deployment of the army. As Nepal heavily depends on income from tourism the government is reluctant to mobilise the armed forces as it would mean full-scale war. In such an event the tourism industry is likely to be hit hard.

The government is, therefore, in a quandary as to what to do and how to deal with the rising tide of insurgency. The way the Maoists are fast increasing their sway and getting latest weapons from various sources there is every reason for any government to be really concerned. If a solution cannot be found immediately, Nepal might well turn into a strife-torn country like Sri Lanka. This will eventually further destabilise the overall South Asian scenario. This portends yet another danger for the region with its possible fall out in neighbouring India and Bhutan. Will the Maoists in Nepal turn like the Tigers of LTTE in Sri Lanka? Will the red star hover over the sky of the Himalayan Shangri La with unending insurgency and the resultant bloodshed?

Ex-PM in the Dock



THE Bangladeshi opposition leader and former prime minister, Khaleda Zia, has been charged with corruptly receiving \$35m dollars (1.75bn takas) in illegal payments when she was still in office. The charge relates to the purchase of two French Airbuses in 1995 for the state-run airline, Biman.

Culture

Dream Merchants' Nightmare

Amna Khaishgi in Karachi



FISSED from the oldest subcontinental cinematic industry, film in Pakistan inherits the dynamic past, business, the inherited film industry in Pakistan, was highly enthusiastic. It created films that explored the realities of life, touched on romance and brought smiles on the tired faces of spectators. Subjects were glorified by the talented performances of artists like Noor Jahan, Santosh, Sabiha Khanam, Sudheer, Shamim Ara, Mohammad Ali, Rahman, Waheed Murad, Rani etc. Vulgar, violence, boring subjects and loose directions were not at all the issues to be concerned about. In short, with limited resources, Lahore-based Pakistan film industry emerged as a living threat to Bombay—the old and largest film industry in South Asia.

Today the same Lahore is bearing with an ailing film industry. What went wrong?

Let's begin with the industry. While visiting Nigar studios — one of the oldest in Lahore, one can easily trace the glorious past, where as it would be hard to find the traces of sanguine present. Facilities at the studios are non-existent, equipment having either been damaged or destroyed. Even when the dust settles, smoke hung in the air from the debris on the ground. Though shootings still going on, people still busy, the sparking energy is missing, some where. What disturbs most is the unprofessional attitude of the industry gurus, which has marred the over all performance of a film production.

Critics indicate various inter-related factors responsible for a twist in the poor performance of cine-industry in Pakistan. First, the arrival of those individuals, who perceived entertainment industry as the place of money and fun and did not believe in the professionalism and perfection which the industry required. Second, the

lack of proficiency — conscious generation, ranging from directors, actors, writers, composers, cameramen, makeup artists, set designers, dress designers, to all who are directly or indirectly related to film production, didn't transfer their skills to the new comers, as foreseen which created a vacuum. Today, it's very hard to nominate any artist of present time as Nadeem's successor, who despite crossing fifty years of his age is still considered as the king hero.

The usage of backdated equipment that might have been very hi-tech in the '40s, but have no strength to sustain the technology challenges of the 21st century, also is usage adversely affect the quality of the film. With the treatment of *baava-adam* machines, even superb acting, strong script and brilliant direction cannot work. When asked about obsolete gadgetry, one of the cameramen, smiled and said, "My dear, all these technological advancements need money, this the directors usually don't cherish, and above all the person who is sitting in the cinema house is not interested in miracles of modern technology. He is only interested in Reema's dance and nothing else. So why should anybody bother?"

Lack of investment is again a major handicap in the cine-industry of Pakistan. Poor investment is directly related to poor business. If an investor is not earning as much as he is spending, he will never go for another venture. Thus a bad production leads to poor quality and the poor quality leads to poor business and the cycle goes on. Even if the money is there, then the improper planning and poor investment strategy completely waste that money. Also, in most of the cases, director does not decide where to spend what. It is actually the set investor who decides where his money should be used. These decisions though often leading to lavish foreign trips in the name of shooting, do not improve the quality of films. The lush green lands of Sri Lanka and crystal blue water of

The Buzz...

Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh: "Any kind of absence of democracy cannot bring good for the people particularly for the poor people. For economic development, democracy is a must, authoritarian government cannot help any country."

Khaleda Zia, Leader of the Opposition in Bangladesh: "The next caretaker government which will conduct the general elections may advise the current CEC to resign since all the opposition political parties opposed his appointment and would not like to see MA Syed in the office of the CEC, for a free and fair election."

Kulsom Nawaz, wife of deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif: "The country had not been formed by a dictator. Dictatorship had always caused an irreparable loss to the country. They had used the country to achieve their personal objectives."

Brajesh Mishra, Prime Minister AB Vajpayee's Principal Secretary: "We are sure and we have been assured that the United States is already doing everything it can to convey to Pakistan. India would not talk to Pakistan 'with a gun on our head and that Islamabad must end cross-border terrorism for the dialogue process to begin'."

Abdul Sattar, Foreign Minister of Pakistan: "We are for a purposeful, result-oriented and serious dialogue with India. Good relations are in the interest of both countries. We'll not permit the abuse of Pakistan's territory for activities inconsistent with the status of foreign visitors. The Security Council recognises that Kashmir is a root-cause of tensions in South Asia. Since its call for a dialogue has been ignored by one of the parties, the world community needs to focus on further action envisaged in the Charter."

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee is the most admired Indian, the only other politician in the lot being Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, according to a nationwide opinion poll on the ten most admired Indians. Melody queen **Lata Mangeshkar** is the only artist from the music world to figure on the list while superstar **Amitabh Bachchan** and former Miss World-turned-actress **Aishwarya Rai** are the others from the entertainment industry for their good looks and acting ability, according to the survey by the *Week* magazine recently. Vajpayee tops the list for being a good administrator, politician, leader, person and not corrupt and Naidu for improving his role in promoting information technology and working for women's progress.

FAMOUS VOCALIST Nazia Hassan was laid to rest London on Tuesday. Nazia Hassan started her singing career with a movie song called *Gurbani*. She and her brother Zohab produced popular song albums which topped music charts. Nazia shot into limelight with the PTV's programme *Sung Sung*. This programme also featured her brother Zohab. Nazia and Zohab received not only their education at London, but also studied singing and music there. Although singers such as Alamgir and Mohammad Ali Shehry were already in the popular singing, it was Nazia who really popularised the pop music in Pakistan. Nazia's album *Disco Deewany* became highly popular and it made a record sale. She also worked on an important UN post.

The Region This Week

Deadline expires

THE DEADLINE for political parties to name their candidates in Sri Lanka's general elections to be held in October expired. It is expected that around thirty political parties will hand in their names to the Election Commission. However, the battle for seats in the country's parliament is expected to be dominated by the governing People's Alliance coalition of President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the opposition United National Party, led by Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Fiji amnesty ruling delayed

A judge in Fiji has ruled that a decision on whether the leader of May's coup attempt, George Speight, should face trial for treason will now be taken by the country's High Court. Mr Speight and his leading supporters appeared before Fiji's Chief Magistrate, Sialeili Temo, seeking a ruling that the immunity he had been granted by the military to end the coup was valid, and that he should be released.

Move for Afghan peace

WORRIED over the impact of the ongoing civil war in Afghanistan on its neighbours, Turkmenistan has initiated moves to bring the warring factions to the negotiating table. Reports from Kabul say that Boris Sheikh Muradov, special envoy of the Turkmenistan President, Saparmurat Niyazov, met the Afghan Opposition commander, Gen. Ahmad Shah Massoud in Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan on Saturday and presented a secret peace package. Mr. Muradov, who was in Islamabad on Friday, had called on the Pakistani military ruler, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, and apprised him of the move.

Minorities to get back property

THE Sheikh Hasina Government today took a landmark decision on the return of the vested property confiscated by the erstwhile Pakistan Government from the absentee Hindu owners during the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965, to legitimate owners and formed a cabinet committee to draft a law in that line. The Cabinet has decided in-principle on the return of vested property and formed a committee to formulate an effective draft law in this regard.

Pupil on right track

"MARKS will be deducted for spelling mistakes, untidiness and bad handwriting — this is the mandatory warning on the question papers of Madhyamik and Higher Secondary examinations. The note of caution is hardly ever noticed by students these days, who don't really care about how they write what they write. But they often end up losing vital marks in the process."

Storm over nude art

A row has broken out in India after a painting containing a nude figure was removed from an art exhibition in Delhi on the grounds that it was offensive. The picture depicts a naked Greek mythological figure - Icarus - perched on top of India's national emblem - the Ashoka pillar. It was withdrawn over the weekend on the instructions of the culture ministry, which reportedly feared it might prompt objections from nationalists.

Editor in trouble

SRI LANKAN court has given a newspaper editor a suspended two-year jail term for criminally defaming the President, Chandrika Kumaratunga. Lasantha Wickrematunga received the sentence for an article in his *Sunday Leader* newspaper in 1995 which criticised the president for failing to deliver on election promises. State prosecutors argued that the article had implied the president was corrupt but Wickrematunga denied this.

Afghan families flee

UNITED Nations staff in Afghanistan say thousands of people have been arriving in the western city of Herat to escape fighting and the effects of drought. They said 400 families had entered the city in the past week, bringing the total number of displaced families seeking shelter there to about one-thousand. The UN said thirty families were arriving a day most of them driven from their homes in Ghor, Badghis and Faryab provinces by drought.

Forcing Suu Kyi to end standoff

NEARLY 200 riot police raided a roadside convoy and forced Aung San Suu Kyi to return to the capital, ending a nine-day stand-off between the opposition leader and Myanmar's military regime, government and opposition party officials said on September 2. Security forces also sealed off the headquarters of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) in Yangon, and a key military leader criticised foreign diplomats for meddling in the country's internal affairs.

Pakistan rules out peace talks

PAKISTAN isn't optimistic about prospects for peace talks with India but it doesn't foresee another full-scale war, senior Pakistani officials say. Although leaders of both countries will attend the Millennium Summit of more than 150 heads of state and government, neither nation expects face-to-face discussions. A meeting between Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Pakistan's military ruler Gen. Pervez Musharraf would have been the first since the former army chief took power in a coup last October.

Nepal tourists robbed

POLICE in Nepal say a group of Spanish hikers has been robbed by unidentified men in the west of the country. Police suspect Maoist rebels may be behind the attack, although there has been no word from the rebels themselves. The group of six was in the western Gorkha district when they were surrounded and forced to hand over the equivalent of about \$1,000 in cash, and a camera.

Taleban capture key town

TALEBAN forces in Afghanistan have captured the key northern town of Taloqan. The reports say the Taleban forces launched an attack on the capital of Takhar Province on Tuesday night and entered the town earlier on Wednesday.

-- Compiled by Navine Murshid