

# 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 ongoing 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 disdain for democracy had usurped power in October 12, 1999.

The heat is already felt. Kulsoom 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 hot water for some time to come. A change in the attitude of intellectuals has taken place as regards to righteousness of 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 Bangladeshi masses. This is to accept the atrocities committed by the Pakistani military officials during Bangladeshi independence struggle. A resolution in this regard was unanimously approved by over 200 activists present in a seminar held at Lahore Press Club on the theme of 'Hamoodur Rahman Report and Tasks for Justice' on 21st August.

But there have also been allegations, from concerned quarters in Pakistan, that the *India Today*'s scoop is a part of the worldwide campaign that New Delhi has mounted over the past several months to malign Pakistan and isolate it internationally. India's intention, they say, is to demonise the military in Pakistan. But even if the *India Today* story is a rehash work on the leaks and speculative reports that have been finding their way into the media in Pakistan and in other countries over some years, it has certainly put the then and current Pakistan military high commands in the dock.

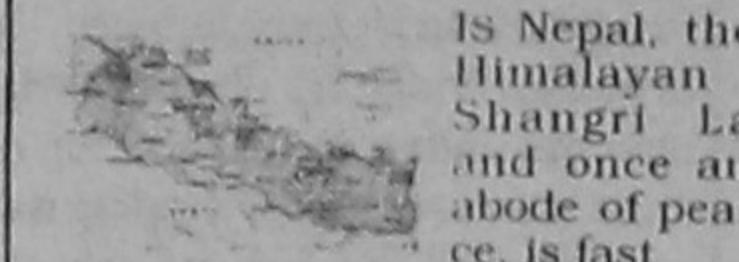
In the meantime, everybody, in a started Pakistan, is now blaming Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. For his political failure, for their defeat in 1971. Lt. Gen. M. Rahim Khan, who is one of the 11 senior officers recommended to be court-martialled by the Commission, has come out with a strong statement condemning the contents of the Commission report as a plot by Bhutto to deflect public anger from the role played by him in the break-up of Pakistan. Also, Gen. Niaz, who has been singled out by the HRC report for various acts of omission and commission that led to the debacle, in his rejoinder to the findings of the report, has said that it was a vengeful act of Bhutto directed against the army to cover up his own acts of misdeemeanour. He has also urged the Musharraf government to appoint another commission of inquiry into all causes, including political, which led to the military defeat.

Although HRC report wanted only to find out what led to the dismemberment of erstwhile Pakistan, and not why millions of Bengalis were butchered by Pakistani army, yet now that the report has been made public, the atrocities carried out in Bangladesh by the Pakistani military are now established. The report clearly spells out that atrocities did happen all over erstwhile East Pakistan. The publication of the report seems to have benefited Bangladesh as far as history is concerned. For, till now politi-

# 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 Pushpa Kamal Dahal 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 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 contacts 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 claims 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 *Panchayet* 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 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 immediately be found 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?

### People



PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpeyi is the most admired eminent 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 artiste 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. Vajpeyi 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 Zohaib produced popular song albums which topped music charts. Nazia shot into limelight with the PTV's programme *Sung Sung*. This program also featured her brother Zohaib. Nazia and Zohaib received not only their education at London, but also studied singing and music there. Although singers such as Alangir 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 Deewang* 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 Wickremasinghe.

### Fiji amnesty ruling delayed

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, Saiseli Temio, 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 Boris Sheikl Muradov, special envoy of the Turkmenistan President, Saparmurat Niyazov, met the Afghan Opposition commander, Gen. Ahmad Shah Masood 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 Pakistan military ruler, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, and appraised 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-Pakistani 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 or 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 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 Ashokan 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

A 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 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 Vajpeyi 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 Mursid

### Culture

## Dream Merchants' Nightmare

### Amna Khaishgi in Karachi



THE Bangladeshi opposition leader and former prime minister, Khaleda Zia, has been charged with corruptly receiving \$35m dollars (1.75bn taka) 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.

### 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."

Kulsoom 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 Vajpeyi'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".

Mauritius might add some colours to the screen but mar the life of the film.

The film directors often blame the myopic approach of cine goers that lead to the engendering of trifling movies. According to them, in Pakistan's society it is hard to have an affordable entertainment — what really is left for the masses is films. Hence the class that visits cinema is not edified enough to understand sensitive subjects. They just demand complete three hours fun-time mainly comprise of vulgarity and violent action. The critics on the other hand, hold the responsible film *value* for addicting the public to such low standard films and created a so-called trend set in the film industry of Pakistan. "If the public wants to see my half-naked dance, my director will show it because he has to earn the money," one of the famous heroines said in one of her interviews. Therefore, cinema that claims to be an important media pillar and which is responsible to educate the masses about issues confronting them has turned in to a *masala* factory in the country.

Government must equal responsibility for the declines of Pakistan's film industry. The dual standards and unrealistic censorship have damaged the entertainment industry a lot. The censorship policy, till date, has neither been able to purify the cinema screen nor give space to the industry to sustain their performance according to the international standards. As the industry is not supporting the government by earning a good chunk of foreign exchange due to bad business, other issues are subduing the industry development issue. Moreover, excise laws have added to the burden, as a result commercial plazas have come up on sites where some of the major cinemas were.

Today, when media is ruling the world, Pakistan's film has to struggle a lot to even remain a feeble part of global entertainment race. The *bhangra* dances and *gandasa*-toting action might be able to satisfy the cine-goers of 20th century, but cannot meet the demands of today's better informed audiences. There is a lot more to show on the screen, which the people really want to see. It is just a matter of one bold step — the *Jinnah* step.

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