Pakistani Diplomat's Outburst

It is evident that should Pakistan want seriously to normalise relations, she must come to terms with the events of 1971. They must be seen in their proper perspective. Bangalee nationalism became the mighty torrent of 1971, thanks to centuries of yearning of its people for a homeland.

The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

RELATIONS between Bangladesh and Pakistan have taken a nosedive following the recent intemperate outburst by the Deputy High Commissioner of Pakistan in Dhaka. Although we in Bangladesh deeply resent and condemn the utterances of the diplomat, we may take solace from the thought that it has triggered a debate which is long overdue.

Those who have lived through the War of Liberation, and I am one of them, vividly recall the death and destruction that was let loose by the Pakistan army on the night of 25 March 1971. It was a war of annihilation of an entire people. At the end of nine months pogrom, which can be best described as a genocide, three million Bangalees perished, 200,000 women were raped and the entire economy lay in ruins. History has few parallel of such massive brutalities in such a short period.

If we travel a little back in time, we recall the general elections of 1970 in which under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the Awami League won an absolute majority in Pakistan. Although dictator Gen Yahya Khan made a pretense of negotiations with Bangabandhu, his armed forces and the entire state machinery controlled by them, went to work to administer a massive blow on the unarmed Bangalees.

Since the ouster of Yahya Khan from power, attempts have been made by the Pakistan administration to make him a scapegoat and lay the entire blame for the genocide in Bangladesh on him. After the overthrow of Zulfiquar Ali Bhutto by the dictator Gen Zia-ul-Huq, attempts were made to paint him as the architect of the genocide in Bangladesh. Although Bhutto's guilt cannot be washed away easily, the fact remains that the top echelon of Pakistan bureaucracy worked hand in glove with him and the military establishment. In a word, the entire Pakistani nation has to bear the responsibility for the genocide in Bangladesh.

It is true that the media in Pakistan was tightly controlled right up to the surrender of Pakistan army to the joint command of the Liberation army and the Indian forces on 16 December 1971 at the Suhrawardy Uddyan. Indeed so successful was the Pakistan information media in putting a blanket on the events in Bangladesh that hardly any news penetrated. I recall that during 1971, when I was Director of Public Relations and Joint Secretary of the Government of East Pakistan in Dhaka, I made two trips to Islamabad. I met numerous bureaucrats of Bangladesh origin and they were amazed to hear all that was going on in Bangladesh. They took heart from the activities of the Mukti Bahini and to hear from me that victory was certain.

Now as far as the genocide in Bangladesh is concerned they continue to refuse to face the facts. For instance they lived a long time with the illusion that Bangladesh was the creation of India. They refuse to face the truth that in Bangladesh a nationalist revolt had been in the making from the birth of Pakistan. In Bangladesh it was powerfully fed by the cultural separateness of the region including language, race and way of life. Language has been the vehicle on which rode Bangalee nationalism. More and more economic disparity took the centre ground and found a powerful echo among the budding intelligentsia. The fact that Pakistan with its two far-flung areas was a geographic monstrosity started dawning on the people. The divide continued to widen. On a November day in 1970 a cyclone hit the coastal areas. The toll was half a million dead and the area, within less than 100 kms of Dhaka, was beyond reach until foreign helicopters came to rescue.

Pakistan has refused to come to terms with her recent history, particularly the events of 1971. Pakistan must face the fact that the struggle for a home for Bangalees is very old one and dates even before the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. The birth of Bangladesh is the ultimate triumph of Bangalee nationalism, irrespective of its mismatched temporary marriage with Pakistan.

On 30 May 1981 Secretary General of the OIC, Habib Chatti and I were together in Baghdad for the annul Foreign Minister Conference. I was the first Assistant Secretary General dealing with political affairs. We were discussing the impending foreign minister conference when the press secretary of Chatti entered and handed him a telex message. It read that President Ziaur Rahman had been assassinated. Chatti wanted my opinion. I told him that the most prominent activity of the OIC at that time was the Islamic Peace Committee, whose chairman was Sekou Toure, President of Guinea and President Ziaur Rahman was an important member of the committee. We immediately contacted Toure in Sudan, who broke down on the telephone. He ordered that a memorial meeting among the eight heads of state be organised in Dhaka immediately. Chatti and I started phoning the heads of state. In the afternoon I met a disparated Chatti, who informed me that Gen Zia-ul-Huq had turned down the proposal saying that people in Bangladesh "would drag him in front of the Savar memorial bareheaded". This is a vivid illustration of the mental frame of the Pakistanis on the issue of apology.

The Pakistani diplomat makes the amusing assertion that birth of Bangladesh is the "loss of its territory". As if Pakistan had proprietary rights on its eastern wing! The question that arises is the outburst of the diplomat, for what purpose was it designed. It would be naive to imagine that it was an intemperate outburst of an individual in a moment of anger. He is too senior a diplomat, since he occupies the post of Deputy High Commissioner, to give vent to public anger in a seminar attended by important personalities. The most positive interpretation that one can attach to the incident is that it was designed to test the waters and provoke his Bangalee audience. It is also possible that those words were uttered with some ulterior motive.

The most important aspect of the statement concerns the loud proclamation that Pakistan has no reason to offer apology. This indeed is the heart of the matter. I have written on this question and have strongly advocated public apology by Pakistan so that relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan can have a degree of normalcy.

It is not enough to argue that Pakistan had already apologised through an official document back in 1974 through the tripartite agreement between Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Our War of Liberation, the pain and anguish inflicted by the Pakistan authorities for long nine months culminating in genocide of an entire population, are events of a magnitude that calls for a public apology on behalf of the entire Pakistani people. Anything less is not acceptable. There are examples galore. The German Chancellor went before the martyrs memorial in Israel and offered public apology. The Koreans are not satisfied with apology, their comfort women are demanding compensation for the torture and abuse that they went through.

Bangladesh is absolutely right in demanding the withdrawal of the errant diplomat. Yet it would be a pity if the matter rested there. It must be taken to its logical conclusion. It is evident that should Pakistan want seriously to normalise relations, she must come to terms with the events of 1971. They must be seen in their proper perspective. Bangalee nationalism became the mighty torrent of 1971, thanks to centuries of yearning of its people for a homeland.

Lest We Forget

Begum Azizun Nesa -- an Eminent Educationist

by Dr Mainuddin Ahmed

I met the illustrious lady, late Begum Azizun Nesa some time in June 1968 in a flat of my friend. The meeting was arranged to discuss with her on my proposed marriage to her niece, Dr Roquia Ahmed (now Professor, Department of Clinical Psychology, Dhaka University). At that time I returned from Britain with higher degrees including a Ph.D. For a young man of our time it was a very uneasy affair. During that time Begum Azizun Nesa was at the height of her professional career. For fourteen years she was the principal of the Teachers' Training College for women in Mymensingh. In some dailies she was called "Manush Gorar Karigar". Therefore, I was expecting to meet a very tough and reserved lady. Till today I do not know how it all happened, within a short while I became so easy and talked to her as if we knew each other for ages. I was much impressed by her simple, affectionate and unorthodox approach.

We lost her on December 12, 1998. The country lost a dedicated eminent educationist who contributed her whole life for the education and emancipation of women in this country. Today when our education system is passing through a crossroad, we should gratefully remember the contributions of the illustrious sons and daughters of the soil, like Begum Azizun Nesa, whose life and teaching give us the inspiration and right direction to follow. It was neither the money nor the fame, but it was her missionary spirit for physical, mental and cultural development and academic pursuit for her students that made her a loving teacher of her time.

Begum Azizun Nesa was born in Kishoreganj in July 1, 1920. Her father was a law practitioner in Kishoreganj court. Both the parents were very enthusiastic for the education of their seven daughters. Azizun Nesa was outstanding in her academic performance. From very early days in her school she showed dedication, intelligence, sincerity and hard work in the classes and always topped the list. She also stood first in primary, higher primary and secondary scholarship examinations.

The contemporary Muslim society in Kishoreganj was very conservative, backward, critical, and jealous of higher education for girls. Her parents strongly felt that she deserved to be sent to a better place and environment for higher education. In 1935 she was admitted to Biddyamoyee Girls' High School in Mymensingh. From this school, she passed matriculation and placed in first division with distinction and obtained letters in mathematics and Sanskrit and a scholarship. Her father sent her to Eden College, Dhaka for college education. She obtained BA and MA in Bengali from Dhaka University in 1939 and 1941 respectively and was placed in first position in the latter one. She gratefully recollected Dr Shahidullah, Head of the Department Bengali and a great scholar of our time, who was not only her guardian and most favourite teacher but also a friend of her father who contributed immensely for the development of educational institutions in Kishoreganj. Azizun Nesa was the first woman of Kishoreganj district to obtain an MA degree. Dr Shahidullah inspired and advised her to take a teaching profession. Begum Azizun Nesa joined Lady Braabourne College in Calcutta in 1943 as a lecturer. In 1939 Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Haque established this famous college for the higher education of the educationally backward Muslim girls.

But her stay in Calcutta was short lived. Upon receipt of a telegraph from Kishoreganj, she came home by the side of her ailing mother who died shortly. Soon her father fell sick and died two years later. She was so grieved losing both the parents; who meant so much to her life. During her stay in Kishoreganj she acted as Head Mistress of the local SV Girls School till 1946. Her hometown had neither the solitude nor the attraction for her future career. She joined the government service as Inspectress of Schools in Mymensingh. In 1947 India was partitioned. As most of the Hindu teachers opted for India, Mymensingh schools faced acute shortages of qualified teachers. Young Azizun Nesa was given the responsibility to organize educational institutions and bring them back to order. With great effort, she motivated qualified Muslim girls and recruited them in schools. In addition to her job she also assumed the administrative responsibility of Biddyamoyee Girls' High School.

It was her professional necessity that Azizun Nesa should do a BT. She was admitted in Teachers' Training College, Dhaka and secured first position with first class in BT. She was the first woman to receive this honour from this college. Soon after she appeared for an interview in Public Service Commission and also stood first and joined Eden College as professor of Bengali; later she also served this college as its vice principal. In 1950-52 she was given the charge of superintendent (now called Provost) of Women's Hall of Dhaka University (later renamed Rokeya Hall). She was the first woman to be assigned this position by the university.

Under a scholarship from US Government in 1952 Azizun Nesa was admitted to Arizona State University. She obtained a Diploma in Secondary Education Administration and MA in Education from this University. During her two years' stay in the US she traveled 20 States and acquainted herself with their system of education. Upon return to the country, she joined Mymensingh Teachers' Training College for Women and soon assumed its responsibility as Principal. The college is located within the palace boundary and buildings of Maharaja Shashikanta. With her tireless efforts and newly acquired knowledge abroad, she started developing the institution as a modern one. Academic buildings were extended, new student hostels built, staff quarters added, number of students was increased and more teachers were provided. It was a full-fledged institution where students had the advantage of enjoying a very homely life and atmosphere. The principal herself was not only a good teacher but also an administrator with strict principle.

However, privately she was a loving person easily approachable to her students and staff members. She used to take personal care of her students and look after their safety and security for a comfortable stay in the college campus. Manna (we affectionately called her) mentioned to me that one day Deputy Commissioner of Mymensingh came to meet her. He was not allowed to enter the gate by the gatekeeper without approval of the principal. Later the DC mentioned to her, "Now I believe, the guardians of the students should be confident that the safety and security of their daughters are in good hands". Not only she was an excellent teacher she was also a patron of their sports and cultural activities. As recognition to her outstanding contribution to the spread of female education in the country, Begum Azizun Nesa received a national award (TGA) in 1966. Azizun Nesa was appointed a Dean of the Faculty of Education of Dhaka University in 1968. She was the first woman in the country to become a Dean of any University.

In 1969 Manna joined the Directorate of Education, as its first Joint Director of Public Instruction with the responsibility of women's education. In fact her interest in female education was revealed when she was very young, as she received a gold medal from Kishoreganj Subdivision Parishad by writing an essay on female education at the age of ten. She served as a member in almost all the national committees on women's education and emancipation. She also actively participated in radio, television, talk shows, seminars and symposia and contributed immensely for overall development of the women folk in country. She traveled many countries and represented Bangladesh. She performed 'Hajj' in 1970, and also later went to Mecca for 'Omra'. She retired from this position in 1977 and joined the Public Service Commission as its member. Begum Azizun Nesa finally retired from the government service in 1982.

Manna was unmarried. However, she never felt desolate and despair. Her younger sister lived with her with her family members. I joined her family in 1968. After my first meeting with her, I did not know how I became so close to her. A barrier between aunt-in-law and son-in-law disappeared. My relationship developed with her like one between mother and a son. Affectionately she used to tell me from time to time, "If I had a son you would have been the one". She was also a friend, adviser, guide and companion. I could never find her agitated or annoyed to anyone. Although a lady of strict principle, her approach to everyone was calm and friendly. She always extended her helpful hand to all her colleagues, friends, relatives and students. Her personal care, influence and contribution to her family members and relatives were unforgettable. Ranu (Roqia) and her brother, Dr Muniruzzaman, a professor (former chairman of physics and dean of the faculty of science) of Jahangirnagar University are the successful followers of their aunt. She had a special place in her heart for her students. Till now when we go out for social events or shopping, we always hear some ladies calling, "Hello Ranu", and recollecting their sweet memories as student, colleague and acquaintance of Azu Apa. Ranu was attached to Manna like a daughter from her very childhood till she breathed her last.

Being a student of literature, her knowledge of Bengali culture and literature was deep. She was very religious from childhood. She stated that in the hostel of Biddyamoyee Girls' High School, she was the only Muslim student. Finding no place for prayer, she went to the Head Mistress. At that time some one had to have the gut to approach the Head Mistress who was very composed and strict. She was so surprised to find such a young girl asking for a prayer place. She respected the girl's request and gave her a place for 'Namaj' in the hostel. She was given the charge of women affairs of Islamic Foundation and a life membership of Bangladesh Quranic Society. Her strict adherence to religious practices did not mean that she was an orthodox lady. She was Bara Apa/Azu Apa to all irrespective to their age, religion and culture. Not only she had deep knowledge of Islam, her Sanskrit made her quite knowledgeable in Hindu mythology. In leisure time I used to be the listener of her stories particularly from Bengali literature and Hindu mythology. She was a very good and interesting speaker. I do not know how time used to pass away listening her stories and personal experience of life. She loved cultural activities. She had a very good voice and used to recite Bengali poems.

Manna's work in the emancipation of Bengali women, particularly in the field of education will always remain a glaring example. She will survive among her beloved students who are currently the leading teachers of the educational institutions in the nook and corner of the country. It could be honestly admitted that currently our education system is going through a crisis. At this juncture of national life we should set the glaring examples to our students (may be teachers as well) and youths of the selfless life and contribution to our national education by the teachers like Begum Azizun Nesa. She did not receive any recognition from Bangladesh Government for her life-long contribution to women's emancipation and education. However, She will remain in the heart of her thousands of students who are the torchbearers of her principles and commitments. We respectfully recollect her memories and contribution to the family and society, and pray for her departed soul for eternal peace.

The writer is a former Professional Staff Member, International Atomic Energy Agency, Vienna, and Director and Chief Scientific Officer, Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

All health information to keep you up to date

Did you know?

The very word 'cancer' generates fear not only among the victims but also the public at large. To remove fears and misconceptions about cancer, public education is important. Cancer is a disease characterized by uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. Normal cells reproduce in an orderly manner and grow for a purpose, such as to replace worn-out tissues/repair injuries. Cancer cells grow and multiply uncontrollably, destroy normal cells and can spread to other parts of the body.

'Cancer no answer' is no more a true comment. Some cancers can be treated though not all e.g. most lung cancers can be prevented by not smoking. Although many cancers cannot be prevented, death can be prevented by early detection.

Not all cancers are noticeable at the early stages, except for cancers on the surface of the body e.g. Cancer of the skin, mouth and external genitalia. Cancer deep in the body is not noticeable early and requires special examination. Routine cancer related checkup (After consulting a qualified doctor) are the best means of finding certain cancers early. The following eight awareness and prompt medical attention also gives an excellent chance of successful treatment.

Eight warning signs of cancer:

1. A sore, which refuses to heal.
2. Any unusual bleeding or discharge.
3. A lump or thickening in the breast or elsewhere.
4. Any change in normal bowel habits.
5. Any change in a mole or wart.
6. Persistent hoarseness or cough.
7. Persistent indigestion or difficulty in swallowing.
8. Impairment of hearing with noise in the same ear.

The above signs do not always mean cancer but if they persist, see a reliable doctor at once.

Next: Health and nutrition, and other tips.

Political Vacuum

by Abul M Ahmad

DESPOTISM in national politics is being increasingly pointed out by the seasoned critics in the mass print media. The political parties who are indulging in this type of distorted political culture cannot escape the judgement of the people when the time comes for evaluation.

The time is before and during the next polls, if it could be held in time. The apprehension is due to the uncertain situation created by the abject failure of the law and order authorities to contain and control open armed gangsterism (including political violence) in the society, as a result of covert support given to the political godfathers behind the scenes.

Added to this insecurity of probable disintegration of the changing society, the infighting within the major political parties has assumed serious levels, raising questions on their continued stability to deliver in future the political public service expected from them at the national level.

The perspective looks bleak from any point of view. Why this poor nation, with a rich history, is being subjected to such severe tests time and again? Surely the divine cosmic is not making a mistake in evaluating the prevailing moral environment in Dhaka? There is a cause for every effect, good or bad, and the society's leaders have to point these out, however unpalatable it might seem to the established leaders, including the political leadership. Why the bad and corrupt leaders are being allowed to be screened and protected by the sycophants and vested groups? The role of opportunism in national politics have to be critically evaluated. The politicians themselves did it once by proposing the neutral caretaker form of government for a limited period. It is like slapping one's own face publicly.

No permanent solution has come out of the CTG concept, as the evil minds of the vested groups could not be contained as yet. Why evil has to rule the Bangladeshis in the near future? This vicious circle has to be smashed. It looks like that the lead now has to come from somewhere else, as the old leadership is failing day by day. Meeting people's unspoken expectations is not that easy for any type of leadership. It is a pity that the country is still without a stable political foundation, on which to build up the future structures. Change is brought about automatically, to cope with an existing environment. Unpleasant situations need unpleasant remedies.

The time has arrived for the voters to come to a conclusion: whether the present moral standard of politics is acceptable, and whether the political leadership is good and strong enough to change the negative tide of events, and lead the country out of the political morass, which the politicians have brought about themselves, hence others cannot be blamed for the state of affairs in the political field.

The good political leadership has to come forward and deliver, otherwise others might try to suppress the politicians. The danger is potentially loaded, and the politicians are blissfully engaged in their infighting and opponent bashing. Today the nation needs saviours to rescue good politics from bad politics. The political leaders are not talking about the weak points in today's political culture, but simply pointing the finger at others.

Today, the images of both the major political parties are at stake, and the insecure people are losing faith in politics to take the country forward in a normal, peaceful manner. There cannot be a vacuum, and many are wondering who may fill in this political vacuum. The time for reckoning has arrived.

Women's DC Lamp Project in Char Montaz

Much More than only the Rays of Light

by Hasna J Khan

Living in the cities, only during a midsummer load shedding we remember that most Bangladeshis are living without electricity in their homes. As a matter of fact, only 16 per cent of households in the country side (where 85 per cent of the people live) are connected to the National Grid. And resolving this situation is no easy task. As talk of building nuclear power plants to meet our energy demands travel around the bureaucratic desks of Dhaka, a much more cheaper, safe and immediate option is being tried for the first time in Bangladesh giving desirable results.

The story begins at a remote island of southeastern Bangladesh, situated along the coast of Bay of Bengal, surrounded by great rivers that have prevented grid electrification from reaching the inhabitants. Where until recently the only form of affordable lighting was the kupi (oil lamp) and children studied by candlelight, women of the village have brought to their families electricity and self-reliance in the form of their own micro-enterprise. The location is Char Montaz, an island isolated from the main land, naturally stabilised and inhabited over the past decades. It is a five-hour motor boat ride from the nearest commercial centre of Golachipa, Patuakhali. High-rise embankments protect these islands from the seawater, making the land fertile for agriculture, a thriving centre for the fishing industry, and giving homes to more than 100,000 Bangladeshi people.

Today, 33 women of Char Montaz are engaged in construction of DC lamps, which are being used with small batteries for lighting the small houses, shops, the mosque and fishing boats. The activity is being funded by ESMAP (Energy Sector Management Assistance Programme), and has been designed and implemented by Prokaushali Sangsad Ltd, an engineering consulting company in Dhaka. The project has revealed to the people that the women of their villages can actually assemble electronic lamps and give them the light they desired for all these years. Children watch their mothers come to the factory, husbands share the dreams of the working women, while women themselves take responsibility and put to use their new skill for empowerment a micro-enterprise, a business cooperative, of their own. Side by side with managing their daily household responsibilities, in less than three months the women have built the capacity to construct 600 lamps a month, which are electronically efficient and reliable in service. They are learning lamp construction with quality control, business development and marketing, and creating a new paradigm in life.

Men of Char Montaz are receiving training to operate the local battery charging station, which is the outlet centre for the women's cooperative. Here, the small batteries are sold at between Taka 1000 and 2000 alongside the lamps, which cost Taka 325 each. This investment is sufficient for daily 20 hours of lighting for a rural household. A concerted effort among the different participatory groups is bringing positive results where each has a role to play. The consultants are providing technical training for effective charging and usage of batteries in surrounding islands, while linkages with rural markets in nearby islands are now being developed through the male family members of the women in the cooperative; the private retailers in the distant islands are selling DC lamps for sales commission and business. Overall, through the micro-enterprise the region is now experiencing much more than only the rays of light.

There are several NGOs working in the char areas, with a mission to enhance education and health programmes. Intricately involved with the economic development of the region, these NGOs are offering micro credit to the people. The beneficiaries of the NGOs are very enthusiastic about using the DC lamps, today they are in search of credit funds for purchasing the batteries and lamps. Once the NGOs begin to share the 'vision', and, once some fund for 'energy credit for the rural poor' makes its way to these remote islands, lighting will become a matter of 'turning on the switch', turning down the shadow of 'poverty'.

For Bangladesh, the concept of 'off-grid' electrification of the households is now one step closer to its target than just a few months ago. People in the villages are judging the performance, saving their money, and discussing the potential of electrification using the DC lamps. They want to replace their kerosene lanterns and give away the smoky kupis; they want to improve the air inside their homes when their children read, and elders dine. To this date the remote households in the distant islands are able to purchase the DC lamps on a commercial basis. There are more than 600 satisfied users of these lamps today, which are being sold in more than 15 rural markets. Their market ranges from Kuakata to Char Kukri Mukri, Rangabali to Char Biswas, where the households, boats, and commercial shops are lighted with electric lamps made by the women. The forest office of Char Montaz and the commercial passenger launch is benefiting from using these lamps. It is a pride for the area as a whole.

Maintaining the quality of its product is a challenge for the women's enterprise, to create the market demand that they can satisfy. In a region where women carry water into their homes every evening, they are now the carriers of modern lighting for their own households. This demonstrates that the local electrification demand can be effectively met with the alternative technical and delivery options.

This project is at par with the recommended national plan for decentralised electrification. The potential of diesel mini-grids, battery charging and solar electrification for households has been investigated recently for Bangladesh, with support from the World Bank. The current project may pave the way towards a working model for empowering women and lighting villages through off-grid electrification for the remote areas.

A recent study has identified 300,000 households in the riverine islands of Bangladesh, and another one million households in other distant locations, where battery lamps systems or solar home systems should be used as a priority for electrification since the national grids will remain uneconomic for many years to come. It is essential for us to introduce and accelerate decentralised rural electrification in these areas, by using private and public electrification services.

TOM & JERRY — By Hanna-Barbera

James Bond — BY IAN FLEMING, DRAWING BY HORAK