

The Message is of Peace and Brotherhood

THE month of Ramadan signifying the spirituality of the mind over matter culminates into Eid, the greatest festival of joy in the Islamic calendar.

As we give alms, fitra and zakat to the have-nots today we are basically reiterating our commitment to poverty alleviation.

Eid is meant to be an occasion of collective happiness and so be it in a real sense by virtue of an egalitarian economy.

What was the flipside of our behaviour during the month of Ramadan that we need avoiding in future? Happily, the priceline more or less held in the market-place this time around as a tribute to preemptive vigil.

Let the Eid be the leveller of all class differences in the societies and help build new bridges for brotherhood and peace around the world.

On our domestic political front, we are looking for the maturity of electoral preparedness rather than a destructive naivete of pointless agitation after the Eid-ul-Fitr.

Eid Mubarak to our readers.

Take the NRBs on Board

OUR chief weakness in terms of resource mobilisation has been keeping the Bangladeshi expatriate community out of the national development orbit.

It is admitted on all hands though that apart from a monetary surplus in collective terms, the non-resident Bangladeshis have global insights, skills in cutting edge technology, connections, and above all, an inner urge to be of use and service to their country of origin.

Our agenda for the NRBs should be modelled on the Indian and Chinese expatriate communities' signal contributions to the technological and economic advancement of their motherlands.

In this overall context, we congratulate Tech-Bangla, an organisation of NRBs and the BUET on their having held a three-day convention for tying technologists, investors, entrepreneurs (TIEs) from amongst the resident and non-resident Bangladeshi communities.

To the Editor ...

Telecom system can save lives

Sir, When a cyclone hits Bangladesh, the conventional public telephone system becomes an easy victim and consequently the LoCal as well as long distance telecom systems are immediately disrupted.

Memorandum of Understanding. This is a very simple system, because a caller from the cyclone affected area can call anywhere in the world through his handheld mobile telephone set.

This is a normal system designed for public service even for places where normal telecom systems do not exist or cannot be installed for topographical reasons.

THERE are faint rays of hope that a dialogue may start between India and Pakistan in the near future.

The latest developments between the two arch enemies give cause for cautious hope. To begin with the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has declared a cease fire in the part of Kashmir, which is under her control.

Thus the stage appears set for a contact at a high level for discussion of many bilateral problems and specially Kashmir.

MR Atal Behari Vajpayee could not have dealt a greater blow to his manufactured 'moderate' image than he did by demanding a Ram temple on the rubble of the Babri mosque.

Events since his December 6 statement highlight the dangerously communal shift under way within Mr Bal Thackeray's demand for the wholesale disenfranchisement of Muslims and Mr L.K. Advani's attack on the CBI which has filed charges against him in the Ayodhya case.

Mr Vajpayee's statement about the Ayodhya agitation being 'nationalist' and about its 'unfinished' agenda was deliberate, carefully crafted, and unprovoked.

This is fully in keeping with his previous statements, e.g. in September at Staten Island that he would always 'remain a swayamsevak'. His obnoxious defence of the anti-Christian violence in December 1998 too was of a piece with this and a prelude to Graham Staines' killing.

Mr Vajpayee has never once moderated his commitment to Hindutva nor his foundational

Indo - Pak Relations

As a matter of fact the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has become moribund due to the continuous mud slinging between the two parties.

not long ago, when direct buses started running between Delhi and Lahore. The passengers in those buses were the Prime Minister of India and the now ousted Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif.

Nawaz Sharif appears to have paid the price by his political eclipse because as he was basking in the new found friendship with India, Pakistani intelligence was plotting to sabotage the entire process.

This humiliating withdrawal was resented in Pakistan and particularly by the military establishment. A whispering campaign started against Nawaz Sharif leading to his overthrow by the army chief Pervez Musharraf, through a military coup.

loyalty to the RSS. It is wishful to imagine that Mr Vajpayee is the 'right man in the wrong party'. Even more delusory is the image of Mr Vajpayee as a 'statesman-like' leader who has 'decisively' distanced the BJP from the RSS.

Why did Mr Vajpayee choose this time to make a remark which surprised even Mr Advani? The straightforward explanation is that he believes the BJP must reaffirm its hardline Hindutva moorings even at the NDA's expense.

More broadly, there was a larger calculation besides serious RSS pressure behind the statement, which reflects a changed stance, even strategy. The calculation is that without RSS-VHP backing, the BJP can't overcome recent setbacks in Uttar Pradesh.

Mr Vajpayee is deplorably wrong to claim that the temple demand represents the 'national sentiment'. It doesn't even reflect Hindu sentiment.

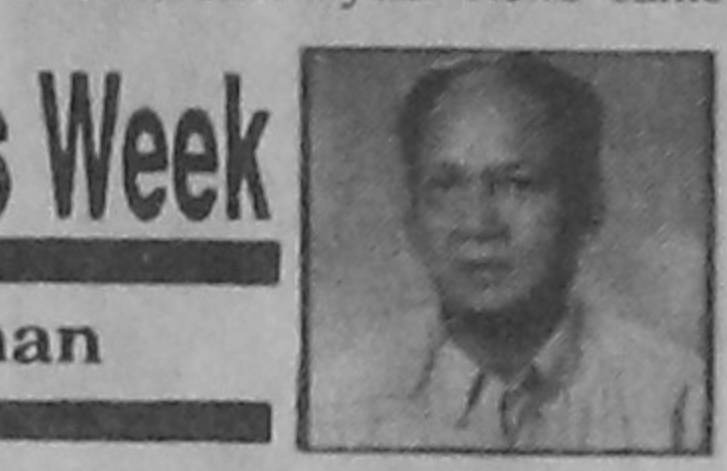
Arabia. This has perplexed the Pakistani people for Sharif was convicted on charges of graft and Gen. Musharraf's ascendancy to power is precisely to cleanse the Augean stables created by the politicians.

The Horizon This Week Arshad-uz Zaman

convincing when he stated that it was the friend of Sharif, Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, who had wanted to provide a home to Sharif.

In any event Gen. Musharraf appears on the defensive. The question is that with such a weak hand will Gen. Musharraf be able to make the kind of compromise, an essential ingredient for any negotiated settlement?

place in Indo-Pak relations back in 1964, when Field Marshal Ayub Khan was firmly in the saddle. I was the Public Relations Officer of President Ayub Khan, the first and the last Bangalee to serve on the personal entourage of President Ayub. News came



that Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had died. President Ayub immediately decided to lower the flag to half mast and asked me to go to Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to draft a warm message to the Indian Government.

To add to the confusion in Pakistan, the other opposition leader Benazir Bhutto has signalled that she was preparing to return to Pakistan and start her campaign to return to active politics in the country.

Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Prime Minister of India, though not in a similar sticky wicket as Gen. Musharraf, is embroiled in the fallout of the Babri Masjid issue. Vajpayee leads a coalition government with his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as the main component.

To demand a temple on the Babri's rubble is to be shamelessly sectarian, majoritarian, and communal. If anything, there is a stronger Muslim claim for restitution of the status quo prior to the Babri demolition.

Mr Vajpayee is Constitutionally obliged to follow a Supreme Court ruling which upheld the Ayodhya Land Acquisition Act precisely because the dispute had affected 'public order and harmony'. The Court ordered the government to preserve the status quo, observe strict neutrality, and 'maintain public order and promote communal harmony'.

Like the RSS, Mr Vajpayee has a reprehensible notion of 'getting

even with history'. Even assuming a Ram temple had been demolished to build the Babri mosque in 1528 AD which is probably untrue-it is wrong to seek 'revenge' 450 years later.

Modern nations do not settle medieval wrongs with medieval methods. At Independence, India signed a social compact between all communities, which involves leaving behind past wrongs and building on democracy and pluralism.

The consequences of Mr Vajpayee's stance are unmistakable. Mr Advani has rubbishised the CBI for the Ayodhya chargesheet. It is grotesque for the Home Minister to run down a major official agency which examined 850 witnesses and 700 documents before indicting him.

Even worse is Mr Bal Thackeray's fascist demand that all Muslims must be disenfranchised. Clearly, he felt emboldened to indulge in hate speech only because of Mr Vajpayee's Ram dhun.

Mr Vajpayee has politically weakened the NDA. Its 'secular' parties lack the guts to confront him for violating the NDA's agenda. Power has prevailed over principle, especially for the likes of Mr George Fernandes.

This spells trouble for NDA constituents, who have been told by their favourite leader that Hindutva comes before them.

The BJP may only end up consolidating its hardline upper-caste base. But that doesn't need consolidation. The temple move will probably repel many ordinary people. But in the bargain, the BJP will have vitiated the national climate to its perpetual disgrace.

Vajpayee's Ram Dhun: Parivar Shifts Rightwards

Praful Bidwai writes from New Delhi

Intemperate remarks from high places are a signal for thugs to run amok. This shifts the political terrain further to the right. It also ratchets up the political temperature. Once this logic comes into play, 'moderates' within the Far Right themselves become its victims.

Even more delusory is the image of Mr Vajpayee as a 'statesman-like' leader who has 'decisively' distanced the BJP from the RSS.

As this column has consistently argued, this reflected softness in some analysts' heads, not softening of Mr Vajpayee's politics. What distinguishes Mr Vajpayee from the Singhals and Sudarshans is not ideology or politics, but style or formabration in the latter, subtended in his own case.

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More broadly, there was a larger calculation besides serious RSS pressure behind the statement, which reflects a changed stance, even strategy. The calculation is that without RSS-VHP backing, the BJP can't overcome recent setbacks in Uttar Pradesh.

Most Hindus see the Ayodhya agitation as an extreme, communal movement.

The Babri demolition remains deeply embarrassing. That's precisely why even Mr Sudarshan conceals 'theories' about a government-inspired 'explosion', and Mr K.R. Malkani a CIA 'plot'!

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A Dare-devil Diplomat's Damaging Disposition

by A M M Shahabuddin

The earlier the Pakistanis realise that to heal the old wounds they should not sprinkle (salt) on the wounds, the better. Rather they should use some 'healing balm.' And that lies in an early apology to the people of Bangladesh. Because this would go a long way in removing the suspicion against Pakistan. Otherwise the big thorny 'but' will be hanging there with its sad message.

WHO is a Diplomat? One who 'lies abroad'! Yes, that's the most satirical, if not text-book, definition of a 'diplomat'. But when a diplomat assumes the role of a foolhardy to show his atrocious 'gimmicks' before a distinguished gathering, he becomes more a liability than an asset for his own country and of course a persona non grata to his host country.

But whom he was trying to fool? Himself? Bangladeshis? Or the world at large? Anyway, he had played a dangerous game, either on his own initiative or at somebody's bidding, with an ulterior motive. He had stoked up and ignited the fire that had not only burnt his own finger, but also greatly damaged the fabric of relationship between the two countries.

It was aptly pointed out in The Daily Star editorial (Dec 2) that 'mystery still surrounds as to why... (the Pak diplomat) said what he said and chose words and expressions that he knew would raise a storm among

us.' Perhaps the mist of mystery will hang there till the sun comes out to throw some light. It is, indeed, difficult to pinpoint where the errant diplomat's centre of gravity lies: government, army or some other dubious zone.

The situation could have been worse had not the Pakistan government called him back. By recalling the 'disturbing element' from Bangladesh, the Pakistan government had not only shown its political wisdom, although belated, but also spared Bangladesh government from taking the most uncomfortable decision, to declare him a persona non grata and expel him forthwith. By this move of Pakistan government, as The DS editorial (Dec 2) said, 'At least some sort of damage control mechanism can be set to work and the spirit of SAARC... can be saved to the extent possible.'

Of the derogatory remarks made by the errant diplomat, the most audacious was his outburst when he said: 'Apology for what? Apology for losing half of my (I) country?' What a bold exposition

of one's patriotism and a sense of sorrow 'for losing half of my (?) country!' However, the question is: Where was this commendable sense of patriotism of the diplomat and his likes when Awami League, led by the undisputed leader of then East Pakistan, Sheikh Mujibar Rahman, emerging as the largest party in then National Assembly in the 1970 general election, was deliberately debared from taking its legitimate place in the parliament to form government with Sheikh Mujib as prime minister?

They were then busy in palace intrigues, adopting all sorts of evil designs and machinations, by an unholy alliance between People's Party leader Z A Bhutto and a group of ambitious Generals, who were having a hey-day, sitting around that allegedly ever-drunk president Gen Yahya Khan. The Irfan Rajas of yesterday can't pretend ignorance of that black chapter of Pakistan's history.

History can't be 'white-washed' so easily by, of all persons, a government official like Pakistan's Deputy High Commissioner. History talks very loudly if one wants to listen to its message. It became an open secret that 'Bhutto and Generals' gang prevented Bangabandhu from becoming the Prime Minister for obvious reasons that the 'Panjabli clique', using the popular Sindh leader Bhutto, was most reluctant to hand over power to a Bengali leader. When the people of then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, saw through the sordid game being played by the anti-Bengali gang, they took to the streets of Dhaka and other parts of the country in protest.

Mr Bhutto, aided by the Generals, was out to sabotage the scheduled Dhaka session of the National Assembly, threatening that legs of any Member of the National Assembly from then West Pakistan, whether elected with PPP ticket or otherwise, who would attend Dhaka session of the Assembly, would be broken. It created a chaotic situation. The Awami League leadership had no other alternative but to get ready for the show-down. And the Generals, like hungry wolves, were waiting for this 'troubled waters' to fish benefits for them. So they jumped in to show the fire-power in order to 'save the country'. Thus the 'show of the Generals' began on that dark night of 25 March 71. Their killing fields were in full blaze. On that fateful night, Bhutto left Dhaka for Karachi, where on arrival, he declared smugly that 'at last Pakistan has been saved.' The world knew well what had been saved and what destroyed. The rest is history written with blood of the millions of Bengalis who had laid down their lives, in the hands of the saviours of Pakistan, for the emergence of a new country, a new state in the comity of nations.

The storm raised by the errant diplomat seems to have calmed down after his departure from Dhaka. But it is likely to brew under surface for some time to come, until Pakistan shows its sincerity in extending an overdue

apology to the people of Bangladesh for the genocide by its army of the Bengalis in 71. Will the present government, headed by Gen Musharraf be bold enough to come forward to accept this hard ground reality? Or, will he pass the buck to the next elected government? At least, he should throw some soothing light on this burning question. 'Hear all, see all, and say nothing' is not always a wise policy.

Encouraging Signs. It is encouraging to note that some strong voices from the upcoming generation, particularly the intelligentsia, in Pakistan are gradually gaining momentum in favour of an early apology by Pakistan to Bangladesh to freshen their relationship. Much water has flown down the Indus and the Ganges over the last three decades, creating new ideas about inter-state relations by healing the past wounds. China, Japan, and even America have recently shown the way. For Pakistan, a strong political will is needed, to follow the examples.

A leading Pakistani intellectual, Dr Tariq Rahman, in a recent article in a Lahore daily, The News (DS Dec 9), has strongly advocated that Pakistan should apologise to Bangladesh for the military actions in 71 'if it wanted to establish genuine friendship' with Bangladesh. He argued why the ordinary Pakistanis would 'bear the burden of the guilt of the military action taken by an unelected government (of Gen Yahya Khan) which was later declared illegal by the Supreme Court of Pakistan?' In fact, the ordinary people were spoon-fed regularly with the well-regimented 'hand-outs' on the 'successful achievements' of the army in action against the 'subversive elements' or the Awami League 'miscraents', as repeated by the errant diplomat in Dhaka after about three decades. But Pakistanis like Irfan Raja are made of die-hard stuff. They seldom change their spots.

So the earlier the Pakistanis realise that to heal the old wounds they should not sprinkle (salt) on the wounds, the better. Rather they should use some 'healing balm.' And that lies in an early apology to the people of Bangladesh. Because this would go a long way in removing the suspicion against Pakistan. Otherwise the big thorny 'but' will be hanging there with its sad message.

The writer is a retired UN official.

"Preaching to India"

Sir, In his letter (DS, 22 December), Mumbai's Rajeev Kumar justifies the Ayodhya destruction "...as the disputed

structure was a symbol of the invasion of India, and Indians cannot be denied the right to regain their self-respect lost as a consequence of that experience'.

Noble sentiments, no doubt. But by this logic, the Taj Mahal, Red Fort etc should go as well. Why stop there? India Gate in Mumbai and Parliament Buildings in Delhi should also go as symbols of the British invasion.

And for good measure, why not do away with English or for that matter

the Vedas as products introduced by invaders!

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