

Facts, Not Fiction

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I HAVE no complaints against the comments made by the Pakistan Press on the Hamoodur Rahman Commission report, analysing Islamabad's debacle at Bangladesh. Editorials and columns blame the army commanders for the "humiliation" when Pakistan surrendered following the sudden collapse of troops and their commanders. My grievance is that the real cause has not been discussed. The Pakistan press does not go far enough to find out why chauvinism in the western part was so loud and blatant that it drowned the voice of dissent, difference and defiance in the east. Why was no accusing finger pointed at the politicians who, for their power and pelf, treated leaders in East Pakistan like dirt?

Since I have been a witness to that era and have met leaders of consequence at that time, I want to tell something, whatever its worth. People may still stick to their version but what I am presenting is facts, not fiction. I had interviewed Bangladesh founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his Finance Minister Tajuddin Ahmed on one hand, and General Mohammed Ayub Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto on the other. General Yahya Khan was not available but his vicious schemes were. "Left to me," Ayub had said in an interview to me, "I would have told East Bengal in 1962, when a new constitution was introduced, that if they wanted to go they could do so. It was no use keeping them if they did not want to remain with us. In fact, once I had a plan to ask them straight-away whether they wanted to

secede. Were they to say yes, that would have ended the problem then and there but certain things came in the way and I could not go ahead with my scheme." Ayub is not correct. Leaders in East Bengal did not favour secession. They were driven to that point. The attitude of high and mighty West Pakistan leaders did so. As back as February 1966, Mujib spoke of the "neglect of East Pakistan." He wanted his part of the country to be treated at par. Lahore was the place where, during a meeting, he spelled out his six-point formula, which became the basis for a national struggle. Tajuddin told me at Dhaka that the six-point programme was the "beginning and we knew we would become independent one day."

The six points were: (1) Establishment of a federation on the basis of the Lahore Resolution and the parliamentary framework of government; (2) transfer of all subjects to the federating states except defence and foreign affairs which the federal government would administer; (3) two separate but freely convertible currencies for the two wings; (4) vesting of tax provisions in the hands of the federating states with the central government receiving a fixed share; (5) complete freedom in

respect of foreign trade, including authority for the unit government to establish trade and commerce with foreign countries; and (6) authority for East Pakistan to set up its own military or paramilitary forces. On these six points virtually the foundation of Bangladesh was laid. West Pakistan tried to show

difficult in East Pakistan. But New Delhi was never a party to his leaving Pakistan, and when the Indian government came to know of it, he was sent back. The Pakistan government could not substantiate its case and had to release Mujib unconditionally. And after his release, Mujib could say justifi-

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

"the hidden hand of India" in this. But the Bengalis had suffered exploitation and discrimination at the hands of their brethren from West Pakistan, not India.

A sign of West Pakistan's desperation was the Agartala conspiracy case (Jan 1968) trumped up against Mujib. It was alleged that he was at the head of a secessionist plot, with weapons supplied by India via Agartala. To give 'conspiracy' a content, Pakistan declared (Jan 1968) PN Ojha, first secretary to the Indian High Commission, persona non grata, accusing him of having attended a meeting of the 'conspirators.' It was true that Mujib had in 1965 crossed into India when he found the going

ably that if ever there was a conspiracy it was "against me" and that the case was designed "to sabotage the just demands of East Pakistan." The Agartala trial made Mujib still taller. He became the quintessence of Bengali resentment against West Pakistan. From then onwards, Mujib's slogan was: "We want to be the brothers of West Pakistan, not its slaves." To criticise who alleged that he was leading secessionist movement, he would say: "The six points will be realised and Pakistan shall also remain." Tajuddin told me that the autonomy movement really began with the Agartala case. "We realised we could not live with West Pakistan," he said, adding, "when we found that the allegation

of conspiracy with India did not pull us down in public esteem, we were emboldened." In the National Assembly poll (Dec 1970), Mujib's Awami League won 167 seats in East Pakistan and this gave the party an absolute majority in the house of 313. The Awami League did not win any seat in West Pakistan. The people voted either as East Bengalis or as West Pakistanis. Mujib, who had swept the polls on the basis of the six-point programme, now pressed for provincial autonomy. But Yahya was not willing to part with power and Bhutto was overlooking his shoulders. Narrating the sequence of events of those days, Mujib told me how he was pushed to the brink where he had no alternative except to give a call for a free country, free Bangladesh. Tajuddin, who founded the emigre government of Bangladesh on April 10, 1971, and Kamal Hossain, the first Bangladesh Foreign Minister the two persons who held negotiations with Lieutenant General Peerzada, Yahya's principal staff officer for a settlement told me that West Pakistan was not sincere about parting with power.

Tajuddin said: "There was no disagreement on any point with Yahya's negotiating team. On 24 December, two days before the Pakistan Army struck, we came to

an understanding about the new constitution; only one or two minor points were left. When we pressed for their finalisation, Yahya's men dilly-dallied and said that they would call us for the final meeting the next day. When no call came and when, despite our effort to get in touch with them, nothing happened we were sure that what our Bangabandhu had said to us was true." Indeed, Yahya had no plans to transfer power to East Bengal.

Mujib added that Yahya was willing to go to the extent of having a Commonwealth of Pakistan, with the eastern and western wings as its two units. Bhutto's version was: The draft plan on which Yahya's men and Mujib's representatives worked envisaged withdrawal of martial law and transfer of power to the provinces without effecting a similar transfer of power to the central government.

The National Assembly was to be divided ab initio into two committees, one for West Pakistan and the other for East Pakistan. The committees were to prepare separate reports within a stipulated period and submit them to the National Assembly. The "two-committee proposal" contained the "seeds of two Pakistans." Hence it was not acceptable to the People's Party. In the Great Tragedy, Bhutto quotes Mujib as suggesting that "I (Bhutto) should become the Prime Minister of West Pakistan and he (Mujib) would look after East Pakistan..." I replied that I would much rather be destroyed by the military than by history."

Untangling the Kashmir Knot

No solution will satisfy everybody but to obtain peace all sides will have to render meaningful sacrifices. No solution can ever be complete, there will be issues which will bedevil the body politic but in the larger interest of South Asia and the peripheral regions, we must untangle the Kashmir knot, sooner rather than later.

SOME hometruths in any difficult situation cannot be avoided. After two decades of painstaking brick-by-brick approach to peace in the Middle East, two immovable objects still remain and can well retard the whole process, igniting a conflagration, viz (1) the Palestinians want full sovereignty over the Dome of the Rock because of Muslim religious sensitivities while the Israelis will never give up the Wailing Wall, considered one of the holiest places in Judaism and (2) the millions of Palestinian refugees, uprooted first from hearth and home in 1948 when Israel came into being, then through the years intermittently because of subsequent wars and civil strife, and living in squalid conditions in semi-permanent refugee camps, want the right of return to their homeland. On the other hand Israel will not (and probably cannot) allow this reverse migration to change the Jewish demography of their State to their disadvantage.

Outgoing US President Clinton made a last ditch effort to exact concessions for peace, both the sides remained firm on their respective stances, with that all hopes came to a dead halt. With impending Israeli elections favoured to bring hawkish Likud Party leader Ariel Sharon to power as PM, the doomsday clock has started ticking, or has it? It took Likud hard-liner Menachem Begin to start the process of Middle East peace, is it possible that Sharon the Ruthless, expected in theory to be far more intractable than present Prime Minister Barak, will in actual practice be more amenable to a lasting solution?

The same analogy can be applied to Pakistan and India. India cannot ever hope to negotiate the difficult Kashmir problem

with any civilian leader in Pakistan, only a military regime can do that. Similarly Pakistan cannot ever hope to make any headway if the Congress Party or a Janata Dal-type alliance of Center-Left is in power, the only hope it has of negotiating with conviction over Kashmir is with the Hindu-extremist BJP and other right wing parties. Unless the hardliners of both countries are an integral part of the process, dialogue will be meaningless. And to complicate issues, there has been a proliferation of disparate freedom fighter groups with widely differing thought processes and objectives. Given that they could be made to settle differences between themselves, will they be prepared to accept the logic of sensible argument? On the other hand, the same Hindu chauvinism that holds the BJP together with its disparate coalition partners will hardly be amenable to Indian PM Vajpayee's same logic stated in a visit to Kashmir, that "Insaniyat" (humanity) was more important than the Indian Constitution.

Both sides will have to sacrifice their egos as well as material positions for a solution, the hard rock on which all peace moves may well collapse will be sovereignty over the vale of Kashmir with millions of refugees scattered all over Pakistan who will, Palestinian-like, want the right of return to their homeland guaranteed in any agreement.

Western analysts routinely describe Kashmir as a nuclear flashpoint but unlike their abiding interest in a Middle East solution to prevent possible war do

they really believe that Armageddon is not possible the next time India and Pakistan go to war? As much as Kargil was an unmitigated political and diplomatic disaster in 1999, in the early days of 2001 it seems it is Kargil that has set them thinking that a Doomsday scenario is quite possible. Western analysts generally tend to take the line of least resistance in keeping with their commercial interests in far more populated India, i.e. stay with the status quo making the Line of

then into a full-scale conventional war? Given its nuclear capability, will Pakistan ever be prepared to accept a Dec 16, 1971-like surrender? Faced with possible military defeat in the battlefield, will India shun the first use of its nuclear capability? Kargil was a distant watershed that brought us very close to a nuclear holocaust, what happens when such incidents take place far closer to the major Indian and Pakistani populace adjacent to the international border? Both sides have to recog-

will stop the Indians from occupying vital high ground, vantage points from where they will be impossible to dislodge. Conversely India may feel the same, adding that open borders will permit freedom fighters free access all over the valley, continuing their militancy with far greater freedom than ever before. Moreover a large influx of returning refugees may upset the socio-economic balance of a settled population, even leading to local conflicts.

Other than the danger of nuclear war, the US has an abiding interest to contain the spread of fundamentalism/Taliban-style, in this it is joined not only by Russia and China but by all the Central Asian Republics. While India uses the sword of fundamentalism to tar and feather Pakistan, both India and Pakistan need to create conditions which allow modernity to counter narrow percepts of religion as practiced by extremist conservative factions on either side. The economic interests of the region, already backward by western and East Asian standards, require that tranquility and stability prevail in the region. In the end, India must look at its own security threat perceptions and remember its own Achilles Heel, that the greatest threat to its sovereignty will be by de-stabilizing Pakistan.

Already an invisible divide separates the South and the East, most populace Bihar is almost a lawless state. With over 16 full-grown insurrections and thousands and thousands of militants up in arms, separatist tendencies will only multiply, India has already been forced to seal its

border with Bangladesh despite the excellent government-to-government relations.

A concrete solution would be to (1) freeze the sovereignty issue for a decade, (2) pull both Indian and Pakistani forces on the LOCs to peace-time cantonments not less than several kms from the LOC, (3) install a well-equipped buffer force on the LOC with adequate satellite and electronic back-up to cover all movements, (the best would be to have a joint buffer force consisting of units of the Pakistan and Indian Armies but that may be asking too much), (4) free movement and access across the LOC to all, in the whole of Kashmir, Indian, Pakistani and Kashmiri population, with the proviso of being able to establish and run businesses but without the option to purchase property, (5) the buffer force will have right of pursuit on both sides of the LOC to counter any militancy, (6) free and fair elections throughout Kashmir, installing a government that would govern the area, forswearing the issue of accession or independence during the freeze period, (7) running programmes to rehabilitate the freedom fighter groups and bring them in from the cold. No solution will satisfy everybody but to obtain peace all sides will have to render meaningful sacrifices.

No solution can ever be complete, there will be issues which will bedevil the body politic but in the larger interest of South Asia and the peripheral regions, we must untangle the Kashmir knot, sooner rather than later.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

Control (LOC) the international border. After more than a decade of simmering revolt and the death of over 50000 Kashmiris, this is a non-starter like any other ostrich-like Munich-type appeasement policy that fails to guarantee the freedom for aspirant third world population. Increasingly the situation is becoming more complex, the rise of fundamentalism on both sides of the divide only ensures that the positions are hardening day by day, the problem becoming more complex and intractable, creeping steadily beyond the reach of logic and argument, sliding into a no-win situation where the end result of escalating violence will be a final nuclear solution visited on each other by India and Pakistan. How many times have we seen small problems escalate into a battle and

nize that the only way to prevent catastrophe is to have meaningful dialogue before extremists on either side box themselves into corners which will take us automatically down the path of destruction without a fail-safe mechanism.

One of the options is to go for a temporary status quo and allow a cooling-off period but freezing the problem without allowing Kashmiris on both sides of the LOC to intermingle is a non-starter. As the recent attacks on the Red Fort in Delhi and on the airport at Srinagar have shown, it is difficult to control headline militants in the field. Moreover the two regular armies have to put meaningful space between them, beyond the range of artillery, with an effective buffer force in between. From Pakistan's point of view the element of risk is what

To the Editor ...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Ease Dhaka's Parking Problem

Sir, To ease the serious parking problem and traffic congestion in Dhaka, we need more parking facilities. The lack of adequate parking spaces at markets and commercial institutions creates havoc on the streets. Markets like Rapa Plaza and Eastern Plaza have parking facilities, but vehicles have increased in volume and these spaces are inadequate. Schools do not have any parking spaces at all. This is mainly why we face traffic congestion during school hours. Some of Rajuk's approved commercial complexes do not have large parking facilities. Most hospitals have parking facilities for their own cars, but not for the public. When talking about parking places, we do not think of facilities for the rickshaws and the taxis and that is our biggest mistake. If we survey the city roads, we would notice that we face unnecessary traffic jams in the city due to the lack of parking spaces for these vehicles.

Thousands of illegal rickshaws ply the city roads without any rules or regulations. Most of the rickshaws pullers park their vehicles on the roads as if that part of the road belongs to them. These rickshaws and the taxis simply add to the jam, which has been already caused by the increase in private cars. To ease

the traffic we have to create parking facilities for these vehicles. Creating and constructing roads will definitely not solve the problem, even in the next 10 years, unless the government ensures proper parking facilities. It is high time that the government took serious steps regarding parking facilities in our city. Without this, in a few years' time, plying vehicles on the streets will be dangerously difficult.

Rizwan Hussain Jabbar
2/16 Iqbal Road
Dhaka

Women's Plight

Sir, Do the women in our country enjoy the same power and privileges as men? Compared to men, the socio-economic conditions, rights, status and standard of living of a majority of women in our country are much lower and down graded. The population of our country is 120 million people and it is almost equally divided between men and women. Therefore it is to be wondered to what extent the demand of women for direct election as MPs in the Jatiya Sangsad is justified?

It is very interesting and surprising that in our male-dominated society, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad, more than 30 MPs, many renowned lawyers doctors,

film stars, singers, educationalists, industrialists, business executives, and government officers are women. Why are the majority of women being subjected to various types of oppression, suppression, deprivation, want, hunger, disease, illiteracy, injustice and violation of human rights?

We would request the 'think tanks' of different political parties to sit together and find concrete solutions to alleviate the suffering of millions of women in our country.

O.H. Kabir
6, Hare Street
Wari, Dhaka-1203

Political malaise

Sir, Your strong editorial on bankrupt politics (The Daily Star, January 11) reveals that politicians are teaching other politicians how not to run the country, and how to continue to toy with the sentiments of the common people, who are not interested in the technicalities of politics. How long are the voters going to be prisoners of autocratic and despotic political leadership?

The problem is that there is a need for genuine political leadership, and the voters are propping up leaders with political idolatry. This has to be nipped in the bud. Our political leaders rake up the past to cash in dividends, which they cannot offer through their own performance, and which falls far short of moral standards by any criteria.

The thoroughly discredited leadership has to be sent packing during the next election. The nation has to survive, not the failed leaders. A change of leadership may not be harmful to the country, but entrenched, feudalistic autocracy

has to be resisted. As in the Olympic games, one has to run and stand first to win a gold medal there is no other way. There is no point in displaying the gold medal won by others.

It is not clear, under the prevailing circumstances, how the general elections will be carried out, as there may be a slip between the cup and the lip. The electorate must ensure that the vicious circle of crooked politics ends, once and for all.

AMA
Dhaka.

Pace attack needed

Sir, Having attained Test status, it's time to prove our worth in the world of cricket. We must improve our shabby bowling line-up, paying special attention to our fast bowlers. We do not have quality and effective fast bowlers, but in Test cricket, a cardinal criteria is to have the ability to bowl out one's opposition. Our bowlers do not possess the caliber to do so, and this is why we must consider the appointment of a foreign bowling coach. The BCB should try to import a coach from either Australia, South Africa, or Pakistan where fast bowling talents are abundant. Selected ICC coaches are currently training some of our uncapped cricketers, but when they enter the national side they will need the guidance of a versatile bowling coach. The bowling coach would help to forge a balanced side.

We also need to prepare wickets conducive to fast bowling. The wicket at Perth, Australia, is one of the fastest in the world while at

Sydney it is termed the "Spinner's Paradise". We can apply fast and spin bowling wickets to help our batsmen adapt to different conditions. The BCB should consider this matter very seriously. If we do not improve now, our future may not be as bright as we would like it to be.

Sameer Ahmed Khan Mojlish
Dhanmodi, Dhaka.

Mini-SAARC?

Sir, Your report (The Daily Star, January 15) hinted that it was considered necessary to create a new NGO agency such as the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies, (SACEPS) now based in Dhaka, to protect the interests of the smaller members of SAARC.

This implies that the bigger countries should undertake deeper cooperation and coordination for the sake of the billions of impoverished citizens in the member states. These people have not been helped by the political masters in spite of joint regional cooperation programmes, for two decades. The problem is a long one, emerging from a history of intransigence that has existed in the subcontinent since the British left.

What is adding to the ferment is the entry of religion, linked with politics, in the region and around the world. Bangladesh has been suffering as it is located downstream in the delta basin, but the headwaters of the major rivers are controlled from outside the country. There are a lot of problems in the region, not so easily discernable to untrained eyes, hence our leaders must put the facts on the table and

not betray the nation. The activities of SACEPS needs to be watched critically, to justify its "baptism".

A Husnain
Dhaka

Preserve our natural sites

Sir, People of all classes visit scenic locations like Madhabkunda, Jaafong, Kuakata, Cox's Bazar, Sunargaon, Paharpur, Mainamoti, Sundarbans, Himchari all year round to get peace of mind. These spots also attract foreigners. The country can earn a great deal from these places. But the administration does not think of these places as assets. If you visit any of these locations, the mismanagement is obvious. The communication facilities are rough, hawkers and messy surroundings are a bother, and there is also growing insecurity as there are all kinds of unruly elements about the place.

The situation should be changed. The people who run these places must be told to be more cordial, competent and practical. We look forward to seeing improvements in the future.

Shamim Ansary Sumon
Savar, Dhaka