

## Bejewelled secrets the ocean will not give up

In 1755, a fortune in gold coins went to the bottom of the Indian Ocean off the coast of South Africa. Next, they surfaced for auction in London - in 1997. Secret sellers weaved a fanciful story about how they came to be found. All of which rather fuelled the suspicions of South Africa, which claims the treasure. **Russel Molefe** writes from Johannesburg, South Africa

**N**EARLY 250 years ago a haul of gold coins sank to the bottom of the ocean off the coast of South Africa. On March 1, 405 of them were handed over to the Bayworld Museum in Port Elizabeth - a third of a consignment of 1,200 coins, which have come to be known as Clive's Gold.

The coins would not have returned to South African hands had it not been for alert staff at the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) in Johannesburg. They noted that in 1997 a London auction house planned to put on sale gold coins that their anonymous sellers claimed were part of a booty once belonging to Robert Clive, the 18th century British general and empire builder.

SAHRA mounted a challenge in the courts arguing that the coins were illegally removed from South African waters. It enlisted the support of the London auction house Spink and Son, which refused to return the coins to the sellers after hints of impropriety came to light.

In an out-of-court settlement with

the prospective sellers, South Africa received 405 coins.

"Had the discoverers of the treasure come to us with their find, we would probably have negotiated an equitable division of the coins between them and the state which would have allowed them to legally dispose of their share," says John Gribble, SAHRA's maritime geologist.

"The fact that they opted for a cloak-and-dagger approach clearly illustrates a lack of respect of South African law and the rights of the public to enjoy and learn about their heritage," Gribble adds, referring to the fact that the mysterious sellers were never identified.

There is a story to be told nevertheless, and it goes back nearly 250 years.

Robert Clive (1725-1774), an army officer who later came to be known as Clive of India for his military exploits in India, had been handpicked to establish Britain's influence in the Indian Ocean. He set sail from England with a fleet of five British East India Company

ships on April 22, 1755 to carry out his mission.

While Clive stayed on his flagship *Strecham*, he put his personal fortune in gold aboard the ship *Dodington*.

The first half of the voyage was uneventful - other than the fact that the *Dodington*, being the superior vessel, easily overtook the others - the *Palham*, *Edgecote*, *Houghton* and *Strecham*.

But after rounding Cape Agulhas off the coast of South Africa shortly after midnight on 17 July - almost three months after setting sail - the *Dodington* struck a reef near Bird Island in Algoa Bay.

Records show that of the 270 crew on board only 203 made it to Bird Island, where they spent a few months stranded. They eventually built a boat named *Happy Deliverance* and sailed to Mozambique where they were rescued.

The loss of the gold did not stop Clive from amassing ever more wealth - and the greed proved to his downfall. One of the most corrupt

colonial administrators in India, Clive was investigated by the British parliament in 1773 on his return from India. His wealth led to allegations that he had abused his power. And Clive committed suicide the next year.

The fact that Clive's gold and most of the other valuables that went down were never recovered meant that the *Dodington* came to be viewed as a 'treasure ship', though the exact location of the wreck was unknown for more than 200 years.

It was the patience of two men - David Allen and Gerry van Niekerk, then holders of the only permit to salvage the site - that led to the discovery of the ship in 1977. A large number of artefacts that were recovered were later donated to the Bayworld Museum.

Twenty years later, a report in *The Times* of London about the auction of 1,200 gold coins touted as Clive's Gold raised SAHRA's suspicions, according to Gribble.

Neither the anonymous sellers nor the auction house linked the

gold coins directly with the wreck. But a United States-based agent acting for the sellers came up with a vague story about a group of pirates having stumbled upon the *Dodington* just as she was going down.

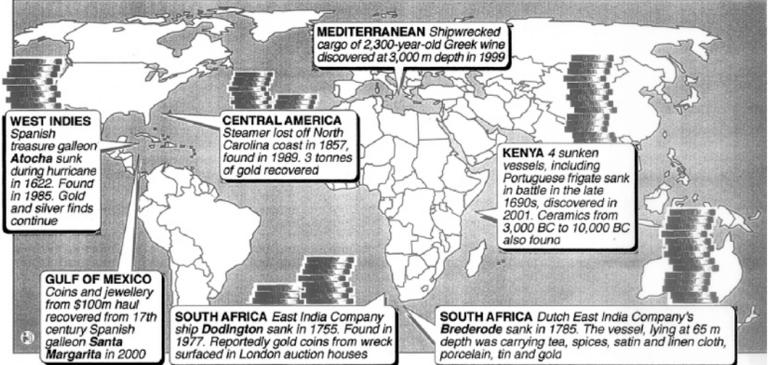
The pirates, the story went, made such a clean getaway with the gold that none of *Dodington's* survivors knew of it. But the pirates' ship was also wrecked, the agent said, and was discovered by a group of unnamed divers in the 1990s.

What roused SAHRA's suspicions was the assertion that the remains of the pirate ship were lying conveniently beyond South Africa's territorial waters.

South Africa claims jurisdiction over cultural heritage in both its territorial waters, which extend 12 nautical miles (18.52km) offshore, and the contiguous zone, which extends a further 12 nautical miles.

"At this distance (of the pirate ship wreck), conventional diving is impossible because average water depth is around 200 metres," says Gribble. "Furthermore, the likeli-

### Sunken treasures



hood of finding the wreck of a small wooden vessel on a virtually limitless expanse of seabed with no reefs upon which it may have been wrecked - or upon which to base a modern underwater search - is less probable than finding a needle in a haystack."

Clive's Gold could be the tip of the iceberg, Gribble believes there

is much looting from some 2,200 wrecks lying along the South African coast.

"It's one wreck per kilometre and we hear of looting from the wrecks. Lack of resources makes it difficult to police the wrecks but we hope the situation will improve," says Gribble.

But that will not solve the mystery of Clive's Gold - not unless the

anonymous sellers want to tell a more believable tale. - Gemini News

Russel Molefe works on the 'Sowetan' newspaper in Johannesburg and specialises on environment, development and heritage issues.

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

### Showing gratitude

It seems that the Bangladeshi people have forgotten the contributions of the Indian armed forces towards the freedom movement in 1971, otherwise they would not have reacted with glee to the inhuman treatment of Indian border personnel at the hands of the Bangladeshi armed forces. After all what is Bangladesh but an insignificant speck in the international scenario with nothing to show in all its 30 years of independence except to spew venom at India and act as a breeding ground for terrorism against India? This is how gratitude is shown by a nation whose millions of refugees were fed and clothed by India during the freedom war of 1971. Rather than continuing in this track of fundamentalism, Bangladesh should concentrate on leading its people away from poverty and make the sense of freedom seem meaningful and tangible to the toiling mass mired in poverty and disease.

In response to Bangladesh's action on the recent border crisis, India should immediately repatriate all illegal Bangladeshi immigrants from India, hundreds of thousands of whom can be found in West Bengal, Delhi, Bombay etc. These illegal immigrants are nothing but a constant sore to India and bring with them nothing but poverty and squalor. I fully support the previous Shiv Sena/BJP alliance government in Maharashtra to forcibly remove these immigrants from Bombay. Also to remove this menace, the Left Front government from West Bengal led by the CPI(M), should be immediately voted out from power because of their active support for these illegal migrants from Bangladesh whose vote they cultivate, by giving these people Indian identity cards. These people then go on to found numerous anti-India Islamic fundamentalist outfits in India against whom the Marxist government turns a blind eye.

**Subhobroto**  
New York, US

### Special relationship

I would like to draw attention to a letter in *The Hindustan Times* of Friday April 26<sup>th</sup>, from one Tapash Kumar, from Delhi, titled "Indo-Bangla conflict".

I am reproducing parts of the letter, word by word. After expressing dismay at the border incident, the writer goes on to state that, "As a protocol officer of the Bangladesh mission in India during 1972-75, I recall our jawans' sacrifices during the 1971 War of Liberation. Even after the liberation, boys of the *Jatiyo Rokkhi Bahini* of Bangladesh were trained by our armed forces. The special relationship and cultural bonds between the two countries cannot be cut off by a small section of renegades. I had the occasion to serve Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (father of the present Bangladeshi prime minister) during his visit to India in 1972. Mujibur Rahman would not have tolerated this incident and would have punished the guilty. There are also strong cultural ties between the two countries. The deputy chief of the *Jatiyo Rokkhi Bahini*, during a 1972-73 official mission to India, visited the Hindu pilgrimage sites of Mathura and Vrindavan. Even now, diplomats from the Bangladesh High Commission attend durga puja celebrations and offer prayers. Dhaka should make sure that the special relationship between the two neighbouring countries is not jeopardised."

I am really surprised at its contents and wonder what others feel about this letter.

**Mohammed Iqbal**  
Dhaka

### Big brother

I wholeheartedly felicitate *The Daily Star* editor Mahfuz Anam for his timely and sincere comments on Indo-Bangladesh relations and India's big-brother like gesture towards its small neighbours like Bangladesh. In fact, he has spoken the mind of millions of

Bangladeshis, both at home and abroad who think of India a friendly neighbour rather than a foe. We believe the same holds true with most common people of India as well. But unfortunately it is not always reflected in the Indian media. For instance, during my five year stay (1993-1998) as a student I observed that most Indian media have a tendency to ignore small neighbours like Bangladesh, Nepal etc.. I remember once reading the same opinion from the Ambassador of Nepal in India in the *Times of India*. Yes, occasionally Indian media does publish some news/features but they mostly portray Bangladesh in a negative fashion.

Also I remember reading the special issues of Indian newspaper on the occasion of 25 years of Indo-Pakistan war in 1996. It was a shocking experience for me to see not a single reputed Indian newspaper had termed the 1971 war as a war between Bangladesh and Pakistan. According to most features published, it was an India versus Pakistan war! Reverting to the main topic, I have a good number of marvellous friends from India and many of them also do not like India's big-brother like attitude towards Bangladesh. Lastly, no more killing, no more skirmishes, we want a stable and cordial bilateral relationship with India.

**Jahed Ahmed**  
Colorado State University, USA

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I shall be frank and forthright on events and possible ultimate objectives which have been agitating my mind and made me deeply upset.. What were the BSF doing well inside Bangladesh territory in Roumari? Can the BDR, a security force defending the borders of an independent nation, be blamed for casualties resulting from such intrusions? What is the basis and intention of the allegations that the BSF men had been tortured, when the bodies in question were highly decomposed and earlier certified to have bullet wounds only by forensic experts? This has been a focal issue for anti-Bangladeshi hysteric vitriol in India.

Were the contents and speed of reaction of the Indian statements consistent with the claim of a friendly state of a sovereign nation? Does dictating to the Prime Minister of an independent nation, as to what action should be taken with respect to BDR chief and concerned villag-



Frightened villagers flee to safety



BDR pulls back to diffuse tension

ers, not amount to infringement on the sovereignty of the nation? What were the reasons and could be the interpretations, for the absolute silence of our government and its controlled media, at a time when the entire Indian media was abuzz with vitriol against Bangladesh based on distorted facts?

Even after all this why has our government's apparent stance been apologetic and one of appeasement? Are small nations subject to interpretations of their sovereignty and integrity by the big and powerful? What could be the ultimate objectives and/or consequences of these events?

**Worried citizen**  
Dhaka

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This is in reference to Anirban, an Indian Bengali's letter (April 27), in which he proudly mentioned that India drove out the Pakistani intruders from the inhospitable terrain of Kargil. I don't know why Indian people assume that their armed forces effectively responded and defeated its enemy. In fact it was the ex-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif who could not bear the American pressure and India was bailed out of hot water because of President Clinton's personal intervention. The Kargil front will be remembered as one where smaller, younger and less equipped Pakistan army's northern light infantry broke the Indian myth that it is superior if

engaged in conventional warfare and that no one can stand up to the big enemy and make its life miserable. Recent incidents on the Indo-Bangladesh border clearly show that India's ultimate aim is to acquire a crazy big brother role in the sub-continent. It wants to be recognised as the dominant power in the South Asian region and play the same role as the British did in the region in the first half of the 20th century.

**Khalid Mahmud**  
Atlanta, USA

**Who is responsible?**  
I want to express my condolences to the families of the soldiers that lost their lives on the border. Even though we cannot do anything to revert the past, we can try to avoid this in the future.

I am very proud to be a Bangladeshi. I am proud of my cultural heritage as well as our history. I do not want to make any comments to the Indian nation; I want to address the Bangladeshi government and the people. The Indian government has always been a bad neighbour to us, since all the history that I can remember. They want to use us as a strategic location, as a market for their products, as a population that they can take advantage of.

I hope at least the Bangladeshi people understand who our real enemy is. Pakistan is on the verge of economic ruin, it has enough problems of its own. After our independence, Pakistan has not been any threat to us. We can hold it responsible for what it did to us between 1947 and December of 1971. We can also blame it for the after effects of the activities of that period. But our ongoing problem has always been India. I wish we all agreed on the fact that our prosperity does not serve India in any way. As a matter of fact, our prosperity serves no one but us.

In reality we are our own enemy. Our government and the opposition party are responsible for more harm in each day than what India does in a year. It is our political leaders that allow India to influence the course of our lives.

The only way we can fight back is to avoid buying Indian products. We need to find strategic partners like China, Japan, Germany, and Australia to strengthen ourselves.

But before we do anything else, we have to organise ourselves as one nation. I would like to end by initiating activities necessary to organise Bangladeshis from all over the world for a better and brighter Bangladesh. May our country and countrymen have a prosperous future!

**Kazi Ahmed**  
USA

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As a Bangladeshi-American I am outraged by the sheer incompetence of both the Indian and Bangladeshi governments against

Pakistani Interservice Intelligence. Clearly Bangladesh military is out of control of Awami League and heavily infiltrated by Pakistani agents. Why do we need a military in a poor country like ours? Vajpayee government once caught sleeping, as before Kargil while all these were happening. Now Parvez Musharraf is visiting Myanmar, the most brutal military dictatorship in the world. The whole idea is to form an unholy Sino-Pak-Burmese alliance against India and to use Bangladesh and Nepal as terrorist bases. Pakistan is also in a good position to use Afghanistan and Kashmir as training ground and to supply raw material for this evil game.

What India need to do is to remove this cancer from the face of the earth. India should do everything possible to dismember and dissolve the failed state named Pakistan. Once that done, we can reverse the mistake and sin committed by our fathers 53 years ago.

**Ahmed I. Farooque**  
Murfreesboro, USA

India is fully responsible for the border crisis. Why had BSF entered Bangladesh territory? Why did BSF shoot at BDR and Bangladeshi people?

I am ashamed to know the mentality of some 'intellectuals' who blamed the BDR and supported India. These brokers of India should settle in India. They cannot live in Bangladesh as they do not love this country.

**Anwar**  
Mirpur, Dhaka

### Getting on the right track

This refers to the letters from "True Indian" and "An Indian" (April 23 and 27). They are right that killing is the most condemnable act. But it is indeed sad that 600 incidents of exchange of fire have taken place between our border troops since 1996, taking at least 331 lives including the BDR and Bangladeshi people. Among them 45 BDR men and local villagers have been killed within last two years. There was no sign of regret from the Indian counterpart despite our sincere effort to resolve the border dispute.

Every life is invaluable, whether it is of a Bangladeshi or an Indian. No life should be lost in killing as no death can compensate for another death. The loss of lives of BDR and BSF jawans and the sufferings of their families should not go in vain. Much has been said about it. Now we are waiting to see the follow-up of the telephone conversation between the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh and India. We are optimistic that this timely contact will put things on the right track.

**Ruchira**

Dhaka

### Government's failure

I must congratulate our BDR brothers for their heroic action. I want to convey this message to all Bangladeshis that our BDR brothers have sacrificed their present for our future.

What did our present government, who all are always claiming to be in favour of our sovereignty, do for our country? On the ground, what did we find? After the border crisis our Prime Minister virtually apologised to the Indian prime minister. What was that for? Was it because the intruders (BSF) had done the correct thing and we wanted to prove that the BDR action was wrong? If so, then the patriotic Bangladeshi must identify who is in favour of sovereignty.

The government wants to divide the Bangladeshi nation by repeating the slogan of freedom fighter and pointing the finger at non-freedom fighter. After 30 years of independence, there is no need to identify who is a freedom fighter and a non freedom fighter. We have a lot of other things to think about and work about to improve our lot, rather than that slogan-mongering.

Because of the government's weak diplomacy and ill intentions, the simple citizens of Bangladesh are being made to suffer not only all along the border but also within the country.

It is no mystery why India helped us during our liberation war. The time is now ripe to teach our new generation as to who is our friend and who is our foe. We must take a lesson from this present crisis and from what happened. The new generation must please wake up from the addition induced by India, We are Bangladeshi by identity, and united. May Allah give us the good will to remain as such.

**Ahmed I. Farooque**  
Murfreesboro, USA

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**BDR troops guarding theborder**

**Hridoy**  
West Kafrul, Dhaka

**A true Bangladeshi**  
Dhaka

As I understand it, India is the cause of the recent border crisis. Unlike Bangladesh, India has a much stronger media all over the world. It is very important that in order to make Bangladesh secure and prosperous, all the political parties should agree on one goal. I wish good luck to my home country.

**Aminul Kochi**  
New York

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I am not surprised by the border clash because it has become a common practice of the BSF to cross the border and attack helpless Bangladeshis. I think it stems from our weak foreign policy. For many years, the BSF has been indulging in these tactics, but this time their operation failed and 16 of them were killed. They are making so lot of noise saying that they have been treated badly.

have entered to indulge in looting, and have shot farmers who have tried to stop them.

It is time that the Bangladesh government solved the border problem and set our foreign policy straight forward like a independent country should do. Poor people are dying, living in a threatened environment and our government just sits in the comfort of Dhaka, giving their usual speech. We don't want speeches any more. Do anything about it now, except giving us a speech.

**Mehadi Shaharior**  
Sydney, Australia

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I condemn the 'True Indian' (23 April) who wrote a very objectionable letter. I also do not give kudos to *The Daily Star* for publishing these sentiments, in the name presumably of freedom of expression. The emotion expressed by the 'True Indian' in no way enhances the so-called friendly neighbourliness. But from another perspective, I congratulate *The Daily Star* for showing broadness of mind by publishing such a derogatory point of view.

I do not see any statesmanship on the part of our government which pulled out of the land, Padua, after re-capturing it after 30 long years. Israel doesn't vacate any land in Gaza or West Bank even though the land is not Israel's. If there was really any cordiality between the neighbours, India would not, in the first place, keep our lands occupied and secondly would not have amassed huge forces and artillery along the border line, nor infiltrated our territories innumerable times, killed our people and tried to build roads and fences in the no-man's land along the border. It's sad and unbecoming of our government to have failed to lodge a strong protest against India's unprovoked attack.

**Shah Affan**  
Ontario, Canada

### For the BDR who died

I strongly believe that someone should initiate a fund for families of the three BDR personnel who sacrificed their lives to protect our sovereignty. If there is any such initiative going on, I would like to be informed.

**Mir Hasan**  
Snoqualmie, USA

### Waiting for answers

Why did India, a would-be super power have to get involved in the bungling called Roumari? And why did Bangladesh try to retake Padua after 30 years?

Why does the opposition have to call so many futile hartals and afterwards congratulate the public for supporting them while actually no one supports these suicidal hartals? Why can't we have a government that can let us live in peace? How many more Palestinian lives, of mostly the youth and the children, are needed by the UN and the international community to at least send a UN Peace keeping force there and report what the barbaric Israelis are doing?

When will the world try the American government for killing/starving millions of babies in Iraq in the name of sanctions? When will they pay for the napalms in Vietnam? Is the slowing down of the US economy the beginning of the end of its empire? Who will make the developed nations pay for making a hole in the ozone layer?

When can we hope to build a saner, safer, better world for our children and grand-children?

**Wasif Islam**  
Dhaka

A section of the Indian media has also reported that this skirmish on the border could be an Indian plan to make people in Bangladesh feel that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is not too 'India friendly' and this would be helpful for the Awami League to win the next general election. Then