

## Outcome of Musharraf visit

### New ground broken for bilateral cooperation

It was historic in the sense that Pak President Pervez Musharraf during his Dhaka trip has expressed regrets over the excesses committed by his country's armed forces in Bangladesh 32 years ago. This reflected a desire on his part to make up to some feelings in Bangladesh. On this point, we would basically reiterate what we had said in an earlier editorial on the subject immediately following his expression of regrets: "The act of apologising for what the army did in 1971 will certainly provide the people of Pakistan with a moral platform that is still missing."

The objective of the visit, as explained to the media earlier on, was to promote relations at both levels: government-to-government and people-to-people. The intent was well-articulated and some forward-looking actions are envisaged. Before itemising the positive decisions taken to expand the horizon of bilateral relations, which in some ways have been ground-breaking, it will be worthwhile to ponder over some baggage of history we are still carrying. The question is: following Musharraf's visit, has there been any change in the status on our sharing of pre-1971 assets with Pakistan and repatriation of Pakistanis of Bihari origin stranded in Bangladesh to Pakistan?

The answer is in the negative. We did not expect any paradigm shift on the two issues by any overnight miracle, but we had expected there would be some icebreaking, even a bit of forward movement, on them. But the issues remain as remote to the Pakistani establishment as before.

Musharraf has himself dubbed these questions as 'highly contentious and sensitive'. As for sharing of assets, he has broadly hinted at 'investments' pertaining to industries in the then East Pakistan like the Karnaphuli Paper Mills and Adamjee Jute Mills creating liabilities for us. That may be the Pakistani view-point on 'liabilities' but Bangladesh has claims to the 'assets'. And, it should be possible to work out a solution provided enough political will is shown from the Pakistan side. Rather than displaying an attitude of resignation to the issue this has to be taken up and dealt with in a time-bound fashion.

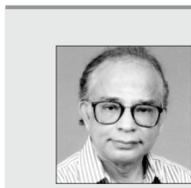
As for taking back the stranded Pakistanis, the Pak president has referred to the 30 lakh Afghan refugees in Pakistan and their progeny (as something of a competing concern), the words in the parenthesis being ours. But Pervez Musharraf looks seized of the humanitarian problem presented by the Biharis when he sees reason for both countries 'to sit down' and resolve it in a 'realistic manner'.

In fact, one recalls that some spade-work had been done in terms of financial and infrastructural arrangements to start a repatriation process during Nawaz Sharif's premiership which was to grind to a halt somehow down the line. In time, it should be possible to build up on that modest beginning. After all, it's revival of a plan for phase-by-phase repatriation one is looking at.

Coming to the concrete steps taken to bolster relations between the two countries these make an impressive list. The decisions to reactivate the joint economic council at the government-to-government level and set up a joint trade council at the level of private sectors in both countries augur extremely well. While the protocol signed between the foreign secretaries is noteworthy, the MOU on cultural cooperation is likely to strengthen people-to-people contacts. Both sides have agreed on extension of defence cooperation as well.

But it is perhaps the revival of our markets for tea and jute with duty-free status in Pakistan which promises to invigorate our trading with that country. Let more of our merchandise find that kind of free access to the Pakistani market.

## State within a state?



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

THE incident beggars all description. It also defies belief so comprehensively that even a half-wit would like to forget it as a bad dream. But the unthinkable happened, believe it or not, as in Ripley's world and the nation is still reeling under its impact. The newspapers have given such details of the incident that very few are asking what happened or even who made it happen. The question now rolling every mind is: why did it happen at all?

The mid-night swoop by police on a girls' dormitory will live in infamy forever. It had no parallel in the past except with the Night of the Generals thirty-two years ago. But that was part of the massacre and rape by an occupation army who treated locals as less than human. The brutality and heavy-handedness with which the mid-night attack took place were not part of a strategy to subdue a people but a manifestation of seasonal power struggle in the campus. But it used a script that seems to be a reprise of the cold-blooded terror of the past. Because of the wantonness of the attack and brutality of action the comparison with the nightmarish past will be compelling. Even after five days of the 'night of infamy' indignation is boiling over because the storming of the girls' hall and the subsequent maltreatment of many of them have now transformed into new forms of repression and brutality covering students, teachers and

journalists. Attempts to give spin to events are now on high gear, which is adding to the sense of outrage and indignation.

The newspapers have chronicled the events leading to the mid-night crackdown by police in great details. The crisis was started by the university administration when it asked the Provost of a woman's Hall to resign six weeks before her tenure was over. The Provost refused and many of the girl students wanted her to continue. A few outsiders, allegedly female leaders

sinister when seen as being deliberate. The crackdown reveals them as being at the back of the barbaric act. The police could not have gone into action without the order and permission of the university administration.

It is highly unlikely that before police was given the green signal for the despicable assault permission was sought from higher authorities in the government. The fact that the government has formed a Judicial Commission to enquire into the incident further reaffirms the view that they were kept in the dark. The

without caring to consult the authorities in the government because they consider themselves autonomous and as such empowered to take any decision that they deem fit. It is their arrogance of power and lack of tolerance that led them to turn viciously against the girl students of the concerned hall for their affront to challenge the decision of the administration. Being besides themselves with ire they gave police a free rein in the use of force including arrest. The very timing of the assault, mid-night, speaks volume about the

reputation ruined. Whatever might have been their fault they did not deserve this trauma and ignominy.

The Act of 1973 which has turned the university campuses into more a battlefield of rival forces than as islands of excellence has elevated university autonomy into a tyrannical and feudal satrapy. The need to consult government on critical issues is also often ignored. The 1973 Act, which allows teachers to indulge in electioneering round the year to the neglect of academic pursuits, should be drastically

and indispensability increase. Police is already vested with too much power which they very often abuse and misuse. Any other government agency with such vast powers would behave the same way. A government or a party in power or any authority should think twice before using police to put down demonstration of opponents except in cases where it is unavoidable. Police may be seen as a very powerful tool from the point of view of the government or the party in power but this tool is a double-edged sword. When out of power politicians experience the same excesses of police brutalities as their rivals. Yesterday it was Sadek Hossain Khoka whose bloodstained face became the shocking image of the victim of police atrocities under Awami League rule. To day Motia Chowdhury and Nasim are being beaten up by police with same effect as newspaper photos show. This cycle will go on and in the process the police will climb higher with more power, formal and informal. There should not be any illusion of the fact that they do not have permanent allegiance to any patron. They too, are likely to become a state unto themselves. In a different context the Law Minister recently said, "all past governments have used police as a political tool and not as an institution. This is a legacy of the past" (The Daily Star). It is time to discard this egregious legacy and bring police under total democratic control for positive governance. The incident at Dhaka University should be the latest reminder that effective control of police and their proper use lies at the heart of democratic governance.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

## IN MY VIEW

The recklessness in the decision by the university administration to use police force against girl students has another ramification. Every time police is used for personal and party interests their power and indispensability increase. Police is already vested with too much power, which they very often abuse and misuse. Any other government agency with such vast powers would behave the same way. A government or a party in power or any authority should think twice before using police to put down demonstration of opponents except in cases where it is unavoidable.

of a student wing, took up residence in the Hall and tried to force the Provost out with the support of the university administration. They were opposed by the students in the women's hall. Thus a confrontation ensued. The next development was the storming of the girls hall by police at mid-night, roughing many of them up and dispatching some of them to thana hajat.

The nation read the news of the brutal and ruthless police action with disbelief followed by shock and outrage. The facts pointed the accusing finger at the university administration. They are responsible for the safety, security and dignity of the girl students. How could they forget their moral and official responsibility and allow their charges to become targets of brutal police attacks and wanton arrest? The failure of the university guardians becomes far more serious and

second Secretary General of BNP has turned the incident as 'unfortunate' which he would not have done if it was a government decision. Finally, the State Minister of Education has bluntly asked the question: How could girl students be taken to Thana-hajat at mid-night in the presence of Proctor and Provost? He blamed the negligence of university administration for the 'unfortunate' incident (Daily Sangbad). In spite of these statements and actions the government will be criticized for its intelligence failure. Besides, as it is well known, all bucks stop with the government.

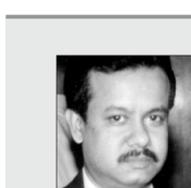
The event is not only 'unfortunate', it is most disgraceful and a blot in the image of the whole nation. It is not the negligence but machinations and conspiracy of university administration which is at the back of this national disgrace. The university administration acted alone,

sinister motive. Was there any emergency like arson, looting or attempt to murder to justify the sudden and massive crackdown at that unearthly hour? The news paper reports do not give indication of any such untoward incident taking or about to take place. If the objective was to free a few outsider student leaders they could be taken out of the hall for safety. But nothing of the sort happened indicating that they were not in harm's way. In ordering police action the objective therefore, appears to have been to teach the demonstrating students a good lesson. This is demonstrated by the fact that while some girls were taken into custody at random others were left out, a phenomenon associated with random punitive actions. Those beaten up and mauled were terror-stricken but those in thana hajat have suffered more permanently, they have their

amended. To facilitate neutrality Vice Chancellors in a university should be appointed from among outstanding scholars of other universities so that he is not beholden to his 'supporters'. The principle of 'publish or perish' should be rigorously enforced so that university teachers engage in research in their subjects more seriously rather than wasting time in extra curricular activities. Instead of availing autonomy for academic atmosphere the university authorities have been more keen to create a state within a state with resultant chaos and lack of accountability. There cannot be autonomy without responsibility, not to speak of financial self-sufficiency.

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## The farmer's daughter



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE farmer's daughter cannot sleep at night, because a recurring nightmare haunts her if she closes her eyes. She wakes up with a start in the middle of the night, sweating and panting as she sees herself bound and gagged in a dreadful dream, her heart exploding from shortage of breath, while she is choking on her own blood. Throughout the night she tosses and turns, sits up and lies down, enviously staring at her husband who sleeps like a fallen log and then indifferently looking, through the only window in the room, at the canopy of darkness, which hangs over their hut.

Throughout the night she hears the footsteps of scurrilous men and nocturnal beasts going past the hut, occasional sound of hooting owls, howling foxes and whispering men increasing the density of deepening nights. In some nights there is unrest in the chicken coop and she wakes her husband to go out with the bamboo stick, used for bolting the door, to shoo away the foxes.

She does all of that with a fear frozen in her heart. All day she

slouches through her chores with eyelids weighing down with sleep and her body exhausted from wakeful nights, while that fear starts moving like an object inside a vacuum with approaching of another night. She feels tired by day and worried by night, her heart throbbing with the pain of a festering wound that doesn't heal for a long time.

The farmer's daughter has tried to talk about it with her husband who dozes off right after the call for Isha prayer, often waking up in the mid-

chest. She is indebted to this clutter of bones who married her when she was sitting in the gorge of death. Her first husband had beaten her one night, when she was pregnant and left her unconscious in a pool of blood. She had not only lost the child, but also struggled between life and death for many months, while her first husband went to jail for seven years.

Internal bruises and external wounds were enough to kill her, which were further complicated by

would shatter the silence of nights, disrupting her thoughts like a fraying cloth. Some nights she would hear a chorus of voices drifting from far-off directions, perhaps the noise of people revelling in a wedding or chasing a thief along the outskirts of the village. Monu the Madman would sing on some nights, his lamenting voice piercing the night with the shards of his tormented soul. Nights are a sleight of God's hand, the farmer's daughter tells herself every night, which vanish the

an intermittent monsoon shower, bitterly sobbing whenever she thought that her life was an unfortunate wedge between two men, that she had been tossed from one man to another like a plighting, her love and emotions recognised by neither man.

But surprisingly she would feel sorry for her first husband, a kind of sympathetic juggle welling up in her heart for the plight of the man who wanted to send her to her death. Doctors have said that she wouldn't be able to bear a child again, her

obscenities and apologies, which was stopped through interference of the village elders, who restricted his movement within one field away from her hut.

The farmer's daughter doesn't sleep at night because she turns the pages of her past, which keeps her awake, and she vacillates between two minds. She wants to forgive and forget as if she could sleep again if she had started afresh with her first husband, if she had told him that she was happy with him, that she missed him, his touch, smile, smell, bickering and betel-chewing after supper. But then she would also worry about his temper, his drinking, insensitivity and arrogance. What if he hadn't changed and treated her badly again? Besides, what would she tell her second husband, the good man who married her knowing that she couldn't bear a child?

One evening in the winter, she met her first husband in the village fair and told him that he had forgiven him for the cruelty he had inflicted on her. He wanted to tell something to her, but she brushed him off saying that he should take good care of himself and then walked away quickly lest her second husband saw them together.

From that night on she could sleep undisturbed, a sense of unbending bringing lightness to her chest. But her good luck didn't last very long, when her first husband disappeared from the village, not to be found anywhere.

She started to stay up again, this time for endless nights, which would last until she didn't wake up to see the light of another day.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## CROSS TALK

Wailing dogs and purring cats would shatter the silence of nights, disrupting her thoughts like a fraying cloth. Some nights she would hear a chorus of voices drifting from far-off directions, perhaps the noise of people revelling in a wedding or chasing a thief along the outskirts of the village... Nights are a sleight of god's hand, the farmer's daughter tells herself every night, which vanish the visible world under the pall of darkness, sort of a foretaste of death when functions of life disappear in the inertia of slumber.

dle of the night under call of nature, when he is rarely disposed to make love to her with the rush of a diner who has to catch the last bus. The man has to leave for the field in the wee hours of the morning and work hard all day until the sun sets in the western sky. Farmers don't have any holidays, weekends or sick leaves; they must go on working for so long as they are up on their feet and breathing through their noses.

She watches with utter disbelief the bundle of bones lying next to her, the only sign of life pulsating in the heaving cavity of his shrunken

the loss of blood. The livid marks in the lumbar caused by stomping and kicking, bore evidence of her harrowing fate for a long time. She had begged that man to spare her for the sake of the child in her womb, but he had turned into a monster and wanted to kill her no matter what. She thinks about that man if she cannot sleep at night, the first man in her life who had sprinkled the virgin field of her womanhood with seeds of love, whose touch quivered her teenage body like a bowstring released from pluck.

Wailing dogs and purring cats

visible world under the pall of darkness, sort of a foretaste of death when functions of life disappear in the inertia of slumber.

Which would tempt her to believe that her sleeplessness was a resistance to death, that she couldn't die until she had let out what sat on her conscience. She compared her existence to a scab, which would ache until it was broken. She would remember her first husband and look at the crumpled man next to her, and feel humiliated to think that she was just an object that had changed hands. She would cry like

womanhood forever sealed in the dungeon of sterility, her fate likened to a fruitless tree that awaits its end under the woodcutter's axe.

In spite of everything, she wants to hear his drunken slurs at night, which drift from three fields away where he lives in a tin-roofed house. He got out of jail after three years on a reduced sentence and hasn't married again. He wanted to see her as soon as he got out of jail, but her second husband and his family didn't allow it. After that he used to get drunk at night and walk around the hut, alternately shouting

## OPINION

# Ministry of Foreign Affairs

BRIG (RETD) A H M ABDUL MOMEN

I was attracted to the article "Reform programme must for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs" by Mohammad Amjad Hossain as it appeared in The Daily Star of 15<sup>th</sup> July 2002 and am tempted to offer some observations and suggestions. I may mention that I had the opportunity of observing the working of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) from three different angles. Firstly as the Director General of BISS (Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies) as this Institute was placed under the administrative control of MFA (1978-82) secondly as Chief of Protocol (1982-84) and then as an Ambassador (1984-86).

MFA is one of the most important organs of any country as this ministry represents the country in the comity of nations, protects and projects its national interests, influence international decisions in its favour through political, economic and military clout both bilaterally and multilaterally. Unfortunately Bangladesh does not have enough clout in these spheres to influence decision in its favour unilaterally, rather it has to work in harmony with other nations and create a situation in its favour. So to protect, influence and extend its national interest it needs an effective and dynamic organisation. To my mind MFA has

tremendous potentiality to play a vital role but needs proper organisation, manpower with all facilities of formal training, adequate financial support and clear policy objectives and its pursuit by the political leadership.

**Organisation:** In my opinion there exists inadequacy in its manpower and regular intake. Mention has been made about different Reform Commissions but I faced one (Enam Commission) after my intrusion in the MFA (this was not my doing). I found that some cut of manpower was made in my area of working which would have made the proper functioning difficult. So this point was referred to the appropriate section of the ministry for redress. An opportunity came for all ministries to represent their respective cases in a conference in the Martial Law Headquarters chaired by the PSO to CMLA (the country was then under Martial Law). Besides mine, many other cases which were argued with reasons were accepted. In my opinion I found that one had taken it for granted that the Reform Commission would cut the size in any way. There may be some truth in it but not the whole truth. In fact many a cases were not appropriately projected with reasons for their retention. Even then I found some surplus personnel.

At different times due to shortage or to accommodate the vested interest lateral entry was allowed.

There should be no ill feeling or heart burning if proper rules/qualifications are followed in such induction. Again, sometimes, Ambassadorial posts are filled up to accommodate political interest or to meet exigency of service requirements. This creates quite a bit of uneasiness and heart burning thus one hears murmuring amongst the regular officers. This practice of political appointment is in vogue in many countries but in our case it should be as discreet as possible.

**Training:** I strongly feel that MFA should have adequate opportunities for training facilities both at home and abroad. The formal training facilities should continue upto mid level officers, subsequently refresher courses for senior officers would suffice. During home posting provision should be made for refresher courses. Some selected officers should be trained at regular interval in some foreign languages of our importance for better understanding and communication during their posting abroad in countries of their language proficiency. Incidentally, Armed Forces train some of their officers for subsequent posting abroad as Military Attaches/Advisers. As part of training junior officers or mid level officers should be included in all bilateral, multilateral and UN Conferences for on the job training. The number of political delegates should be as minimum as possible and those

selected should be given an orientation of the functioning of different organs of UN or the conferences to be attended.

To back up and to keep abreast with basic knowledge and the latest developments of international politics MFA should have a well stocked library. Built in research facility though there exists in some or all ministries but this section hardly has the capability to undertake any worthy research work as the officers are mostly seized with the day to day normal routine work. Besides, most officers so posted in this section to undertake such research work may not like it as their home posting is likely to be longer. Efforts were made to induct academicians for research work but it did not work as there is no quick fixes in research work. Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman realising this weakness of MFA and Ministry of Defence thought of establishing an institute to supplement the efforts of the ministries instead of beefing up their existing capabilities. He thus gave green signal for the establishment of BISS (Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies) and it was established in 1978. Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence were to be chairman of the governing body of this institute by rotation but now one observes that this policy has either been changed or this is being deviated. Shaheed President Zia even

forwarded a list of subjects of socio-economic importance to the Institute to undertake both research work and to organise seminars and he not only attended all seminars but also participated actively. He involved the Institute to make regular presentation to him on Iraq-Iran war and even asked to prepare position papers when Bangladesh became a member of the Al Quds Committee. The faculty members did a good job in this respect as they were most excited and delighted to put forward their views before the President of the country. Now the facility of BISS has not been utilized

To provide proper training there should be a career career planning of officers, I mean this planning will offer appropriate opportunities to all officers for training in their posting both at home and abroad. Equal opportunities be offered to all so that they have an incentive to show their merit, area of specialisation and capabilities while holding their appointments at different level both at home and abroad. Postings of officers be related in order to provide them with equal opportunities of working conditions in both developing and developed countries.

**Opening of missions:** Establishment of Missions be decided after proper evaluation keeping in mind the utmost national interests and priorities. Efforts be made for representation in all regions subject to financial and other constraints.

But when a Mission is established it should be properly staffed, all members of the Mission be paid adequately to maintain compatible life style of the environment. Comparison need not be made between the life style at home and Mission abroad. Then one need not have a Mission abroad. In the past in some cases Missions were established without proper evaluation. Mission officials/staff should have full and complete support of MFA in the discharge of their proper duties.

**External publicity:** This is an important Desk of MFA and needs proper attention. Normally an appointment is made purely on adhoc basis to accommodate some interest. I feel this wing should be filled up by the career officers of the MFA and be considered like any other Desk of MFA. This will make understanding of the working and the tasks of External Publicity easier and better. The officers of Press Wings of the Missions abroad remain under the administrative control of the Ministry of Information. The dual control of the Press wings of the Missions abroad creates some working hiccup in publicity. These need streamlining for better projection of the country.

**Legal wing:** This is also a wing which I saw working on adhoc basis. It is a very important wing and needs appropriate attention. I saw a Barrister working in this Wing but for appropriate rank adjustment he left

MFA and later on became on Hon'ble judge of the High Court. I saw another Barrister who worked in this Wing and had a posting abroad too. Again, I saw another Barrister working for this Wing and subsequently was probably absorbed as he retired as an Ambassador. I feel this wing be given appropriate weightage and terms of appointment should be such that the wing can attract most qualified persons and they are given opportunities to acquire adequate knowledge of international law as this wing is required to vet agreement/MOU and understanding of maritime boundaries to protect national interest. So organisation of this Wing should be most professional and not filled with person on adhoc basis.

**Economic wing:** In the context of our national interest our thrust should be in the economic field, be it in obtaining employment opportunities or financial assistance in exploring hidden treasures as due to paucity of fund and required technology we are presently unable to expand markets for our products. I am not aware whether this Wing is still in existence. All governments spoke loudly of economic diplomacy by placing people of their choices without subsequent evaluation of their performances. I do not want to delve upon the perception and meaning of these by our political leaders but we need real efforts in

this field to promote, expand and protect our economic requirements. Political freedom without economic emancipation is of no use. We have very excellent examples of two powerful countries namely Soviet Union and China before us in this respect. China liberalized the economic policies to attract FDI to develop industries all over the country and has thus prospered without loosening political grip on state policy whereas Soviet Union gave political freedom without corresponding economic development and thus they got into financial difficulties.

**Conclusion:** MFA is a very important ministry and needs proper attention in its organisation, induction of officers, provision of ample opportunities of formal training facilities both at home and abroad and reward and incentive for most capable officers. But my experience is rather different as I felt that MFA's output could have been more visible knowing its potentiality. MFA like any other Ministry should continue pursuing a policy keeping national interests utmost irrespective of who are at the helms of state affairs. No country even the most powerful ones can live in isolation, so a country like ours which needs political and economic support should have a Ministry which can meet the challenge of changing situation.