

After Sakurai visit

Fresh impetus to Dhaka-Tokyo ties expected

WE attach great value to the visit paid to Bangladesh by Shin Sakurai, Member of the House of Councillors and Special Envoy of the Japanese Prime Minister to Dhaka. It ended Thursday on a positive note.

The trip could not have come about more propitiously. For, this was part of the celebration of "Japan Month" arranged by the Japanese Embassy to mark 30 years of diplomatic relations between Tokyo and Dhaka. The upbeat frame of mind of the Japanese on such a historic occasion as conveyed through the sending of a delegation to Dhaka under the leadership of Sakurai needs to be reciprocated by us in full measure. We think, it must begin with the appreciation of the choice of Sakurai as the special envoy to Dhaka. Far from being a stranger here, he has had a close rapport with us. He has visited us quite a few times in the past, not to mention the keen interest he evinces in our development process, something that comes naturally to him given his involvement in some of the cooperation projects.

Three decades of bilateral ties provides a valuable opportunity for stock-taking as well as some introspection. There is little doubt in the minds of experts and well-wishers of Dhaka and Tokyo that the bilateral ties need special attention to be taken forward from this point on. Understandably, some headway has been made on the JBIC issue which should augur well.

Japan's unique and highly gratifying standing with us as our biggest bilateral development partner makes us hope her private investment in Bangladesh economy will grow alongside ODA. Indeed, it is bigger Japanese private sector investment, FDIs to be precise, that Dhaka eagerly looks forward to. There are three options: direct and collaborative investment in the Export Processing Zones (EPZs); re-location of labour-intensive Japanese sun-set industries in Bangladesh; and investment in infrastructure-building.

We are hoping the impressions which Sakurai with his clout as a parliamentary leader has carried to Tokyo will yield results in terms of furthering the existing close relations between our two countries.

Decline in tourist inflow

Let's boost it by some concrete measures

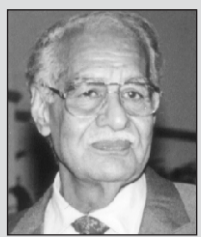
AN eleven per cent dip in the number of tourists over the first six months of the year points to the fact that the restriction on on-arrival visa following 9/11 may have had a part to play in this. Both the State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism and Chairman of the Bangladesh Parjatan (Tourism) Corporation have admitted that the newer and tougher visa regime has had a direct impact on tourist inflow.

Now, this is indeed problematic. The September 11 attacks in the United States has necessitated tougher visa and immigration regimes across the globe which has obviously had a fallout on the aviation and tourism industry in the world. Now, for a Third World country, such as ours, the resultant shrinkage in revenue has proved rather painful. Yet, the security reality prevents an immediate turnaround to generous immigration policies. Therefore, the government needs to find alternative means to boosting tourism without compromising the essential security concerns.

The way the government treats tourists from South Korea provides a cue to the riddle. Since May this year, under a special arrangement, on-arrival visa is given to South Korean citizens visiting Bangladesh for the first time. The government now needs to bring more countries into the special coverage. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries could be the ideal starting point in this regard. Besides, at a recent Organisation of Islamic Countries inter-ministerial conference on tourism in Riyadh, increasing interest of Arab tourists in Asian destinations came up for discussion.

There lies another solution for Bangladesh. After September 11, access to North American and European countries has become a little dicey for citizens of some Muslim countries, especially of the Arab world. As the Arab tourists look for alternative tourist spots, Bangladesh should do more to attract their attention.

The religious virus



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

ANY untoward happening in Pakistan gives India some kind of fiendish satisfaction. The reaction to the victory of religious parties in that country has been no different. As if it had to happen to a country which was founded on the two-nation theory.

But Pakistan did not have so much religion when it was created. True, religion was the basis on which it was constituted. However, its founder, Qaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, had second thoughts on the two-nation thesis. He told his people that the two nations did not represent Hindus and Muslims but Indians and Pakistanis. This took the wind out of the sails of religious parties. What they did in the united India to create divisions was no more relevant. They could not harness support on the slogan that Islam was in danger. The preponderance of Muslims in Pakistan had made such a cry futile. Religious parties realised this to their dismay when they failed at one poll after another.

It was General Zia-ul-Haq's drive for the Islamisation, even in the armed forces, which contributed to revivalism. The absence of democracy only strengthened the self-proclaimed fanatics. The field became open. Political parties, on the other hand, were too complacent and too confident. They dis-

missed religious outfits as a nuisance. But the mullahs and the maulvis never gave up and made their activities felt from the insecure of mosques and madrasas. Today's Pakistan is a product of those efforts operating over decades.

I can see the beginnings of what happened in Pakistan in my own country. The one-nation ideal, which animated our national struggle, is still there. But, without spelling out the two-nation theory, some political

Both defend themselves that their purpose is to ensure that our "national values" stay intact. The Sangh parivar-inclined intellectuals, journalists, historians and others are being broken into saffronisation and organised.

Both Sushma and Joshi stop at nothing. I was horrified to see on Doordarshan the other day F M Hussain, Shabana Azmi and Tabu saying individually: "I am an Indian." If after so many years they, who

Islam were never in the corridors of power at Islamabad. Unfortunately, both the BJP and the Sena are partners in the governance at the centre. This gives them a cover and also immunity. While they are there, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal can never be banned although their record is worse than that of the SIMI. Pro-BJP state governments cannot be dismissed, whatever their acts of omission and commission. The BJP

and the madrasas, in elections under the banner of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (United Forum for Action). They have gained substantial strength in Pakistan's National Assembly and in the legislatures in the North Western Frontier Province and Baluchistan. These religious parties were of no consequence till now. They never won more than three or four seats in the National Assembly. India too was a haven of secularism before 1977. Till then the

today may be more acute than India's. Pakistan is a country where religion has played an important role. India's saving grace is that it is a secular democratic society that has never been threatened by any military coup. People believe in the constitution and have respect for democratic traditions. India's strength also lies in the fact that certain institutions act independently, whatever the colour of the government. For example, the Election Commission withstood all pressures and threats on the Gujarat election. But the Hindutva elements are dismantling our secular edifice, brick by brick. Institutions are under pressure. Saffronisation is being pushed in all fields. The middle class appears more contaminate than the rest because it is beginning to find in Hindutva its long-lost identity. What most of them do not seem to realise is that no one identity represents India. It is the combination of different identities that makes India.

The saffronised elite must also keep in mind that militant organisations like the VHP and Bajrang Dal are going to replace the BJP one day. This is how fascism rose in Germany and took over. Secular forces are too complacent to fight against the danger. I remember Atal Behari Vajpayee, long before he became the Prime Minister, telling me that they might be able to stop the storm that was brewing in the country. He did not elucidate what he meant. Probably, he had in mind the storm of fundamentalism. I wonder whether he can still if L K Advani goes on building up persons like Modi and does not utter a word against a new contraption called Parveen Tagodia.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Hindutva elements are dismantling our secular edifice, brick by brick. Institutions are under pressure. Saffronisation is being pushed in all fields. The middle class appears more contaminate than the rest because it is beginning to find in Hindutva its long-lost identity. What most of them do not seem to realise is that no one identity represents India. It is the combination of different identities that makes India.

combinations are foisting it on the country under a different terminology: The Hindus are one nation and the minorities another. The phenomenon is more visible in the fields of information and education. In the name of tradition and heritage, India's multi-cultural society is sought to be pawned to the demagogues of one culture. Information Minister Sushma Swaraj and Human Resource Minister Murlidhar Joshi are the worst culprits. The first is peddling a particular point of view, the majority community's religious beliefs and superstitions to the detriment of pluralism and clear thinking.

The second is introducing new textbooks in schools and appointing the Sangh parivar men in government or government-aided institutions to disseminate prejudice and distortion in the name of history.

represent the best in our secular ethos, are forced to make such statements, there is something definitely wrong with our rulers. The history books that Joshi's men have rewritten omit the assassination of Gandhi because the killer represented the Hindutva forces.

Like Pakistan, political parties in India avowing secularism indulge in the same kind of complacency. They argue that religious parties can never succeed in a country which is traditionally rooted in pluralism. They may be absolutely wrong. But this is their point of view. However, the reality is that the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Shiv Sena have already occupied a large space by playing the religious card. The two are in a more advantageous position than the religious parties in Pakistan. For example, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Jamaat Ulema-

has been able to cobble together, with the help of pseudo-secularists, a coalition which gives it clout.

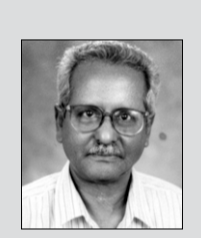
If this had not been the case, Chief Minister Narendra Modi would have been dismissed soon after the carnage in the state. Bal Thackeray of the Sena would have been tried after the Srikrishna Commission report implicated him in the Mumbai riots and, more recently, arrested when he threatened the Muslims. And Ashok Singhal of the VHP would have been behind bars after his announcement that there can be more Gujarats.

Today's Modi, Thackeray and Singhal will be tomorrow's Qazi Hussain Ahmed, Maulana Shah Ahmed and Fazalur Rehman of Pakistan. This is what we have to guard against. The three Muslim leaders are important figures. They have emerged from the mosques

Jana Sangh, the predecessor of the BJP, did not have even a two-digit figure in the Lok Sabha. Now they have 181 in the 545-member house. What saved India soon after independence was not the irrelevance of religious parties. The Hindu Mahasabha and others came into the field in August 1947 itself to incite Hindus that the Bharatmata had been cut into pieces. Anger had begun building up against the Muslims who had supported the demand for Pakistan.

It was Mahatma Gandhi's assassination by an extremist Hindu that came to strengthen our secular ethos. The RSS was banned and religious leaders went into hiding. People would literally beat up those who even vaguely mentioned Hindutva. They associated them with the Mahatma's murderer. The question that Pakistan is facing

Real test ahead for major parties



M.J. ZAHEDI

PAKISTANI newspapers were busy with the recently-held general elections in the country. They published pre-election goings-on and are now full of post-election speculations. In 'Dawn', Roedad Khan, a former Secretary to the Pakistan government and presently a regular contributor to newspapers, has asked whether it is another false dawn and another regular contributor has discussed the election results as the rise of the religious right with a mandate. In 'The News' one of the paper's regular contributors has discussed the same question. Punjab's influential English daily, 'The Nation' (published simultaneously from three centres including Karachi) has also written at length on the rise of the religious right as a result of the elections.

Roedad Khan has discussed in detail the various changes brought in by the Musharraf government to

the constitution, especially the provisions which give the impression, as a result of these changes, that there is yet another source of power in the country and that there is yet "another authority" in the country. He then concludes with a quotation from 18th century Ger-

least at the national level. The writer says that this could be a preferred choice with the establishment, because, whatever they may say, they are very uncomfortable with having to deal with the group of religious people with a mandate. One view is that this could be a

observers by the sheer magnitude of its electoral success, it is as much an ethnic as well as an ideological one. Many Pakistanis, particularly those in the Pashtoon belt or others from the same area but now living elsewhere in the country, had a great deal of sympathy for their

West. Already, voices in Washington and London have accused Pakistan of not doing enough to rein in all Islamic militants. It must be remembered that the changes and surprises thrown up by the elections are of a totally unexpected nature as the MMA represents an ideological

hands in the parliament (and out of it also) to demand the withdrawal of the Generals from politics. But many of the politicians who now grace the assemblies owe their success, even existence in many cases, to the patronage they have received from the government, naturally they are unlikely to be ungrateful to the hands that fed them. But in the present scenario the army should realize that its institutional interests lie in supporting the secular elements and right thinking elements.

The next few years are a test both for the mainstream parties and the religious ones to prove which one is closer to popular aspirations and has a firm handle on real problems that face Pakistan. For the MMA it is a real test, as they are coming into power for the first time without coalition partners at least in one province. They have to outgrow their image (but many think that it will be a tough task to prove that they have proper understanding of running a modern state, and showing tolerance for social and religious diversity). Failure will mean going back to political wilderness. For the major parties it will be real test, for if they continue doing politics as usual, popular discontent will grow against them, and the people may begin to think, rightly or wrongly, that their salvation lies in rule by other parties, may be the religious parties.

M J Zahedi is an eminent columnist in Pakistan and formerly the Editor of the Khaleej Times.

LETTER FROM KARACHI

The next few years are a test both for the mainstream parties and the religious ones to prove which one is closer to popular aspirations and has a firm handle on real problems that face Pakistan. For the MMA it is a real test, as they are coming into power for the first time without coalition partners at least in one province. They have to outgrow their image (but many think that it will be a tough task to prove that they have proper understanding of running a modern state, and showing tolerance for social and religious diversity).

man philosopher Hegel: "Man learns nothing from history except that man learns nothing from history."

Another contributor in 'Dawn' discusses how the different parties should tackle the situation that has arisen: "Simple arithmetic tells us that with a house of 272 directly elected members, a coalition of at least 137 is needed to form the government. On paper the quickest and easiest way to achieve this is for the PPP (63 seats) and the PML-Q (77 seats) to join hands. Others would jump on the bandwagon, willy-nilly. Such expediency would keep the MMA out in the cold, at

preferred choice with the establishment because, whatever they may say in public, they must surely be uncomfortable with having to deal with a group of religious people with a mandate. The same view is trying to fine-tune the run-up to the elections to ensure that neither Benazir nor Nawaz's factions in the two parties performed too well, but their team of fixers forgot about the rest from the right. But now it has to live with a fundamentalist government in the frontier province, with a strong perseverance of the same elements in another.

Some observers believe that even if the MMA has surprised

fellow tribals in Afghanistan who have been subjected to very heavy bombing by the Americans over the last year.

Analysts and observers in Pakistan and elsewhere too have said that any future negotiations with India seem impossible. They believe that if they become part of the federal government, it is unlikely that they will soften their stance. On the one hand, their presence in the government will strengthen the hands of the faction in the high command that favours a riskier Kashmir policy.

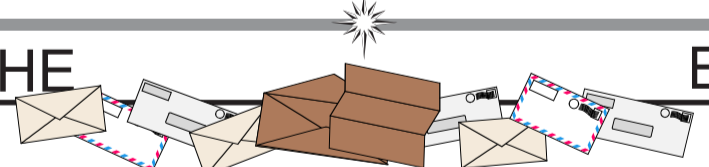
But most severely affected will be Pakistan's relationship with the

force that will be hard to fob off by cosmetic changes.

It should also be kept in mind that this is the first time that the components of the MMA have joined together, therefore chances are that it will not be a very cohesive coalition; once power-sharing talks begin, there is no telling how these groups will be able to function in harmony.

One should also remember that Pakistan's politicians have little experience of running complex coalitions, especially with the army looking closely over their shoulders. It would be not only difficult to suggest that all democratic forces join

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Welcome army

We heartily congratulate the government and thank the PM for deploying army to curb crimes. From the October 18 issue of different newspapers we learnt that army has been called out to tackle law, order situation and so far a number of people have been arrested including three Ward Commissioners and political leaders of both the ruling and opposition parties. Previously, people were passing their days in fear and anxiety, now they will be able to heave a sigh of relief. It is a timely and praiseworthy decision and we hope that the government will not show mercy to any guilty person. We urge the government to keep it up for it will bring peace and stability in our society.

As usual, the opposition leader Sheikh Hasina is criticising the government for deploying army to crackdown on criminals. She said that it shows that the government has failed rule the country by themselves. How absurd! Has Sheikh Hasina forgotten that during her regime, army was deployed to control traffic jam?

Nur Jehan
Chittagong

and order situation. Therefore we all should help and play a responsible part in this.

Zasi
Dhaka

The government has taken the right decision at the right moment to deploy army to control terrorism and nab criminals. As this government made a promise to the countrymen during their election campaign that they would free the country from the clutch of terrorism, they should fulfil their pledge.

As the police department lacks adequate manpower and modern weapons, the government has deployed army along with police and BDR and they have already earned peoples' confidence. Even the ruling party people are not spared from their "Operation Clean Heart".

It is a very positive sign on behalf of the government and this initiative of the government is very laudable.

Md. Faisal Hassan
Dhaka

I am greatly relieved hearing the news of deployment of army to crackdown on terrorism. BNP should be greatly lauded if this is meant to be a neutral drive.

I am a pro-Awami League but the nation comes first. It is a fact that

AL was a total failure in curbing terrorism. I support BNP for this cause and anything better that they are planning to do in future.

Tanvir
Georgia, USA

Worried about army

Army came to aid civil administration to curb on crimes and improve the law and order situation. The nation observed that one day suddenly troops are on the street looking for criminals. Why they were brought in and under what circumstances nobody knows. The only thing one can hear a few people and some ministers saying a giant leap has been taken in the right direction. One may wonder what is that direction. No explanation on why civil administration failed. What alternative steps taken so that civil administration can start functioning properly. We saw a mockery in the name of press briefing. The apprehension and raids are said to be going on according to a list prepared by whom nobody knows. The intention of army drive is good but one should understand that the armed forces is there to protect the citizen and country's sovereignty. They have a clearly defined objective to perform. Bringing them in a shady water may deviate them to perform the prime objective for which they are paid.

A. Khan
Canada

I am shocked to see that most of the writers are writing in this column to welcome army deployment.

The law and order situation went wrong mostly because the party in power could not or did not control their own cadres. Democracy to not be blamed for this. People who failed to maintain law and order should take the blame and make way for the others to try.

We have seen the implications of giving the civil responsibilities to the army in the past. If as a nation we have not learnt from that then let God help us.

I visited Bangladesh last summer and during that time the law and order situation was awful. But everyone can understand why situation has come to this state which is nothing but patronising of criminals by the corrupt politicians.

What is the remedy? Deployment of army? It might give only temporary solution but can't solve the problem permanently because you need to go to the root to solve any problem. But nobody is doing it.

Already 7 people have died while in custody and we have no idea how they have died. However, the authorities provide a reason of those deaths - "Heart stopped to act". But have you ever heard that anyone died but his heart did not stop?

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About half a dozen people died in army detention already. Do we know whether they are culprits for sure? Are all the big criminals in army custody?

Wahed Nabi
Sheffield, England

Hovering sadly the midst of a hopelessness, people in the street cannot feel anything but elation as the street harbours less of the political thugs. I amply understand this simple psychology.

Mohammad Zaman
USA

Like many other Bangladeshis I also welcome the recent army crackdown against terrorists and criminals. Although it's not desirable from a democratically elected government but for all the practical reasons we are ready to accept if it really helps to clean up the society from terrorists.

But if this crackdown aimed at opposition then it's going to be dangerous for the nation. People in general were happy on first 2/3 days operation. Army acted on real criminals. But things possibly are getting changed. People possibly have started to question about the real motive behind "Operation Clean Heart".

People of this country know who the real criminals are. All the major political parties have harboured

criminals. Arrest them all. People will be more than happy if the army arrests criminals like Joynal Hazari, Haji Selim, Haji Mokbul, SK Chowdhury, Pintu, Dipjol and the list goes on.

Finally I would request the army to act heavily on the real terrorists but not on political opponents.

A Bangladeshi Citizen
USA

"Miss Photogenic!"

There has been a growing popularity of fashion shows, beauty pageants etc among the new generation in our country over the past few years. Although a host of arguments can be presented for and against this "imported culture" but the most fundamental question remains -- does this culture actually liberate women or just highlight them as "beautiful objects"?

I personally think that the Miss Photogenic contest and similar competitions are objectionable because they seek to create and to perpetuate notions of female desirability which are actually oppressive and restrictive for most women. Traditionally our society creates unfortunate stereotypes of women as self-sacrificing and subordinate housewives, the new role models of glamorous playthings are no less limiting, and indeed may go further in preventing the possibility of true equality between the sexes.

Feminists groups everywhere violently protest beauty pageants as they see them as "the commodification of women" and "a disgrace to womanhood".

Surprisingly enough, women's groups in our country have so far remained completely silent in voicing their protests for some unknown reasons.

Monirul Haque
Dhaka

Some of your readers, reflective of a portion of our society, have expressed outrage at the Miss Photogenic pageant and similar beauty/talent shows. I respect their views and beliefs and hope so do others.

Here is an honest piece of advice for them that is accommodating of all shades of opinion on the matter: if you do not like a pageant or function, do not tune your television to the channel showing it. For that matter, nobody is compelling anyone to buy tickets to such shows, watch it on television, or read it in the newspapers.

I do not want to decide what others can see on television or on stage; please do not try to determine what I can watch on television or in my theatre.

ES
Missouri, USA
Happy returns to

Abdul Bayes

We are delighted to see the writing of Abdul Bayes in 'The Daily Star' on October 24 issue after a long period. His articles are easy to understand even to the general readers because he compares difficult facts with real life situations. His article "Rewards from Research: Rice and rice farming" is thought-provoking indeed.

We like to see his writings regularly in 'The Daily Star'.
Md. Asheque Islam
IBA, Dhaka University

Contract service pay

At the moment there may be about 200 government officials working on contract in different ministries and departments. They receive only 20% of their old pay as their pay after deducting 80% which has been paid to them as pension. As a result their net pay comes to 2400-3000 taka only which is too meagre an amount in these days of high prices.

In this process the government is saving a few lakh taka only. But this is serving as a disincentive to officers serving on contract.

I therefore appeal to Ministry of Finance to allow normal pay to contract service officers which will provide them with incentive for giving their best.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury
Mohakhali, Dhaka