

Foreign secretaries' meet

Dhaka and Delhi responding to each other's concerns

THE foreign secretary level talks between Dhaka and Delhi have covered a lot of ground and positive signs are visible in quite a few areas. India has agreed to discuss its river-linking project with Bangladesh. The visiting Indian foreign secretary has also assured his counterpart of his country's assistance in setting up Bangladeshi trade missions in some northeastern India states. We welcome the talks aiming to further expand ties between the two neighbours and address the concerns that stand in the way of carrying forward bilateral cooperation to its fullest potential.

The understanding on FTA talks resumption is a forward-looking development. Bangladesh's concerns in this respect are well known, and we cannot emerge as an effective trade partner with India unless the latter withdraws the various non-tariff barriers in importing our products. The trade imbalance is a major obstacle that has to be reduced to ensure a mutually beneficial relationship. Rapid economic growth of Bangladesh will ultimately turn out to be an advantage for the neighbouring countries looking for stable and durable trade partners.

Bangladesh attaches importance to Indian security concerns including cross-border terrorism. A broad understanding exists between the two countries to fight the menace. Dhaka's stand on the issue is unequivocal.

However on a different plane, there are border shootings which leave many Bangladeshi citizens dead every year, that need to be stopped. This is an area that scarcely received the attention it deserved.

The regional atmospherics are now highly conducive to strengthening bilateral relations between any pair of countries in South Asia. India and Bangladesh can gain a lot from the situation since their task is to push ahead the plans that have been agreed to, particularly in the fields of water sharing, trade and commerce and cultural exchanges.

Plan afoot to tap phonelines?

A dangerous step backward

IT is with extreme trepidation that we read the news of an initiative getting underway to eavesdrop on phone lines. The security agencies have requested that BTRC, the telecom regulatory agency, amend the existing Telecoms Act to grant them the power to tap both landlines and mobile phone lines and listen in on phone conversations in the name of national security.

No one would argue that preserving national security is a legitimate and indispensable function of a government. However, it is fair to ask what national security interest is served by listening in on private telephone calls. If there exists legitimate probable cause to believe that a certain phone line is being used for anti-national activities, a warrant to tap that particular phone can be obtained. The state does not need to retain the power to tap phone lines arbitrarily and indiscriminately.

Listening in on the phone calls of private individuals is a grievous denial of fundamental rights. The rights to expression and privacy are essential for a smooth functioning of democracy. There exist certain fundamental liberal values which form the foundation of open and democratic societies, and freedom from unwarranted government intrusion into our everyday lives is one of them.

Already troubling has been the tendency of governments to politicise everything, and the danger that this kind of expansion of the state's power will be used in a partisan manner against political opponents of the government cannot be overlooked. Government routinely accuses the opposition of terrorism and acting against national interest, and there can be little doubt that the power to tap phone lines would be used, not to safeguard national security, but to harass those unpopular with the government.

It is commendable that BTRC appears to be resisting the efforts of the security agencies in this matter. It is imperative that we be more vigilant of our rights and more vocal in our opposition to plans to curtail them. The government must understand that the fundamental rights and freedoms of the people are its sacred trust that cannot be allowed to be compromised or undermined under any pretext. To do so is to run the risk of starting down the slippery slope to a totalitarian police state.

The month of March and the Liberation War



NURUDDIN MAHMUD KAMAL

EACH year the month of March brings for the sad memories of brutalities and ruthlessness, the terror and orgies unleashed by the barbarous hordes of Yahya-Bhutto clique upon the unarmed, innocent Bangladeshes. The resistance by freedom fighters against unprecedented blood bath that begun on 25 March (night) 1971 expresses the indomitable will that worked behind the struggle for liberation.

The sacrifices, torments, agonies and patient sufferings of the people; their faith and conviction, their heroism and courage led to final victory on 16 December 1971 -- all these in the form of a terrible storm swept over East Pakistan, also known as East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and touched the distant shores of the world. As a freedom fighter, I humbly intend to share some episodes that touched my sentiment.

In 1971, innocent people, children and women were the victims of Pakistani soldiers' atrocities. Thrown to the wolves, people tried to defend their lives, virtues and dreams. People of our generation were lucky to have witnessed the historic speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 7 March, but even today some are puzzled why "Mujib" (as he was popularly known) did not declare independence on that day? I shall come to that question later.

In my opinion, the liberation war of Bangladesh is essentially a saga of nationalist revolutionary guerrilla operation launched against the established Pakistan

government. Even after losing the confidence of the majority citizens, the Pakistan military government stuck to power in utter disregard of constitutional norms and practices. They were not ready to modify their policies to honour popular aspirations, particularly of the people of the eastern wing of Pakistan. Consequently, such activities began spontaneously as uprisings, and then they were organised into revolutionary operations. The aim was to replace a hated rule of mili-

province-wide general strike, coupled with non-violent non-cooperation movement engulfed the entire East Bengal and forced the army back into barracks; because it failed to stand up against the audacious defiance of the Bangladeshes.

Hard pressed by daily strikes, which continued up to 6 March, and which had pervaded all spheres of public life including government offices, secretariat, courts, communication services

programmes. Public places were filled with huge crowds where Mujib's instructions, to the people, were regularly announced under the signature of Mujib's closest and trusted aide Tajuddin Ahmed, who became Prime Minister of the Government in exile during the War of Liberation in 1971.

Sheikh Mujib's impending declaration of independence heightened the anxiety level of the military-bureaucracy in Rawalpindi (the Army Headquarters located in

a formula (Loshak, David, 1972, PP 71-72) -- a compromise between unilateral independence and President Yahya Khan's insistence on attending the assembly's session scheduled in Dhaka on 25 March, 1971.

On 7 March, 1971 everybody in the country was tense. In presence of the mammoth crowd of one million assembled in Ramna Race Course, Dhaka, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman spoke in his usual style. The key features of

the village level. This was a solid example of arousing the Bangalee crowds by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The civil disobedience movement, in East Bengal, had begun to manifest the degree of proximity and community -- support to the freedom struggle that ensued in the next nine months. In the words of Lt. Col Ziaur Rahman in early 1972 (Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman), the speech of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 7 March, 1971 was a "green signal" for Muktiyoddha (freedom fighters).

Contrary to Yahya's calculations, Sheikh Mujib's declaration served to inflame further Bangalee passion. Technically, the day of confrontation was further postponed as Mujib didn't declare independence on 7 March, 1971. Even then, Bhutto accused Mujib of contriving a "situation that would facilitate the separation of the two wings of Pakistan by constitutional and legal means" (Bhutto ZA, *The Great Tragedy*, Pakistan People's Party Publication, Karachi). The Awami League, the winner of the general election in 1970, fell pray to Yahya's trap. Mujib's response to Yahya's announcement yielded enough time for a military build-up in East Bengal. In retrospect, some say, had Sheikh Mujib, true to his image, led a million-strong crowd only about six kilometers away to the Headquarters of Eastern Command (in Dhaka Cantonment) to seek Tikka Khan's surrender, a dreadful catastrophe would have been averted and Bangladesh would have become independent on 7 March 1971! Political philosophers, however, have contested this. Historians, someday would hopefully research on this critical issue and provide a logical analysis for the future generation of Bangladesh. For the hundreds and thousands of common man, like me, who fought and won the war of liberation, the pride of being a freedom-fighter always rekindles for memories about 7 March, 1971 and will continue to do so as long as we live in this world.

Columnist Nuruddin Kamal is a Muktiyoddha.

CHRONICLE

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tary junta that entered the political domain of Pakistan in 1958 and reinforced in 1969, with a popular government led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. There is no denying the fact that the political philosopher of such a revolution was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, a great leader, who organised it; his philosophy started with Bangalee national heritage.

Indeed, the right to our own land and enjoyment of a fair social treatment motivated the Bangladeshes to rebel against the military regime. For having a job, decent wage and social justice workers assembled on the streets in the initial period of liberation movement. For students and professional workers, the goal was freedom. The mood of the people was gradually changing. On 2 March, for instance, a general strike crippled life in Dhaka and other places. It was an example of successful political operations led by Mujib. The defiance of curfews was another instance, which was assuming dangerous proportions. People faced the army that had come out of its barracks to restore law and order, with bare fists. A

mills and factories, commercial establishments, the army was forced to observe constraints on rations and other supplies. This was a classic example of successful political operations, which directly advanced the cause of liberation movement, using non-violent peaceful measures.

In this trouble-torn state, Lt General Tikka Khan -- the most unrelenting hawk in the entire Pakistan Army -- flew in to Dhaka to assume the dual role of a Governor as well as the Martial Law Administrator. He carried with him his previous reputation of being the "Butcher" of Baluchistan (for strafing bullets on muskulls from the air on an Eid-day). His arrival in Bangladesh served as a red-rag to the bull and further increased the defiance to established authority with each day passing. Dhaka (it was spelt as Dacca in 1971), the focal point of non-cooperation movement, witnessed the weakest effect of the government. Public buildings and government offices flew black flags. The national anthem was almost audaciously removed from the radio and television

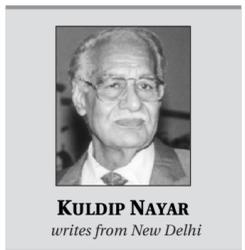
West Pakistan). The hawks were tense. A political problem was sought to be solved militarily; because, "political alternatives did not unduly tax Gen. Yahya's mind". He was the President, CMA, and C-in-C of Pakistan Army (three in one). Yet, he smelt too much of a defeatism and thus for him there was no turning back. He saw the remedy only in applying greater force (Mascarenhas, 1971, P 95) i.e. a military solution for a political problem. Prior to 7 March, Yahya Khan's objective was perhaps to contain a political outburst by a show of force; later it was turned into a bid to crush the "rebellion" brutally.

The Awami League's mandate until then was not for independence, but for autonomy (Loshak, David, *Pakistan Crisis*, London, 1971; Loshak, David, 1972, PP 71-72) and unilateral declaration of independence would mar the chances of external aid and those of a recognition against Pakistan's internationally recognised government. Reportedly, wrangling late into the night (of 6 March), they (Awami League members) devised

his speech included four demands -- the withdrawal of Martial Law, the immediate withdrawal of all military personnel to their barracks, an inquiry into the recent killings, and an immediate transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people before 25 March (*Dawn*, 8 March, 1971). In his announcements on the new approach (in the face of province wide civil disobedience movement) on 7 March, 1971, Sheikh Mujib thundered: "Our struggle this time is a struggle for freedom. Our struggle this time is a struggle for independence." Those words still linger in our ears.

In the crowd, myself and my friend Engineer Mashrul Haq (Komol), and Dr. Mozammel Hossain were stunned. The people went hysterical to execute Mujib's 10-point directives, which related to the closure of all offices, stoppage of the payment of rent and taxes, hoisting black flags on all buildings and on the formation of Sangram Parishads (revolutionary councils) in each union, Mohalla, Thana, thus covering the entire administrative structure, down to

Poll time, show-time



KULDEEP NAYYAR writes from New Delhi

I THOUGHT after 12 general elections we would have settled down to a steady, moderate and responsible way to choose our representatives. No political party is new to the exercise. Still, nearly all of them have reduced the polls to a tamasha, believing that all that they have to do is to bamboozle the voters. Both the BJP and the Congress are not stopping at anything. It was disappointing to see their top leaders welcoming some jaded film stars and discarded cricketers in their midst as if a Solomon had walked in. The media, short of new ideas and hard news, over-reacted as usual. TV networks went on showing the "spectacle" the whole day as if they were breaking a big story.

Democracy is not hullabaloo or a Christmas Eve. Nor is it a licence for hawking parochialism and sectarianism. The system demands a peaceful, thoughtful response to the issues tormenting people. It is a clash of ideas and ideologies. Elections give people an opportunity to choose a particular party or a combination for governance on what they have done or had promised to do.

But the dust which most politi-

cal parties have raised has covered up the real issues, making the ballot box exercise a farce. The whole thing looks like a nautanki, a gaudy display of meaningless rhetoric by leaders of different hues.

I imagined that the BJP would be more confident having completed the full stint of five years plus. But the party looks nervous and edgy. It is touching all points, not knowing what may sell. If it is so sure of its

one former CEC was that if he had been there, he would not have allowed "such nonsense". Advani compared the last yatra which caused hundreds of lives with Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi salt march. After completing the current one he would equate it to the entire national struggle for independence which RSS chief Golwalkar had opposed. I hope Advani has no other yatra in view because he is running out of

the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) will get a majority in the Lok Sabha.

When it comes to suggestions, Advani's is the most prolific. The latest is that he wants the people to vote either for the BJP or the Congress. He argues that the votes given to a regional party will be a waste. The regional parties he runs down are not a tiny set-up that works from some back room. The Telugu Desam, for example, is a

independence had Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, a staunch Hindu Mahasabha leader, as a minister. The different suggestions, however, underline that the BJP is trying to rub off its stigma of being anti-Muslim. It wants to give the impression that it is moving from right to center, from saffronisation to something more acceptable to Muslims. This also explains why every third day a Muslim leader of sorts is presented from the BJP

stage as if the Muslims are joining the party en masse.

The BJP's nervousness is understandable because the Muslims constitute 13 per cent of the electorate. But the touchstone for the community is Gujarat. If the party were to dismiss Narendra Modi from chief ministership for the massacre in the state, the Muslims might reverse their opinion about the BJP. It was, however, heartening to read Advani's observation that good relations between India and Pakistan had a favourable effect on the equation between the Hindus and the Muslims in India. This is true because the anti-Pakistan feeling becomes the anti-Muslim feeling. But it has taken Advani almost all his life to appre-

ciate this basic point. In Pakistan also, the anti-Indian bias visits on the Hindus. But their number is so small that it matters little at all. However, General Pervez Musharraf has amended the constitution to convert the separate electorate into a joint one.

Conditions in India will improve when the states become viable. Just as the future of any political party is dependent on UP and Bihar -- the two have some 120 seats in the Lok Sabha -- India's tomorrow is dependent on the progress the two states make. From that point of view also, the regional parties are important.

It is a pity that Vajpayee did not convene the meeting of National Integration Council even once during his tenure. Nehru had founded it in the fifties to enable all political parties to rise above their petty loyalty to ponder on the country's problems relating to separatism and integration. Vajpayee has been reluctant to even call the meetings of National Development Council which discusses all-India economic policies against the background of what the Planning Commission does. He has been closeting more with the Sangh parivar than the chief ministers.

This reflects a particular way of thinking -- esoteric, narrow and biased. If all that the BJP is saying and suggesting comes true, the party may be able to get some credibility among the secular forces. But one fears that the BJP may go back on all its promises after the polls. The RSS has not changed. And all may turn into a mere tamasha.

Kuldeep Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

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performance as it claims, why have the rath yatra? Even if there is no communal riot, as happened in the wake of L.K. Advani's earlier yatra, the minorities will be hell scared till it ends.

Advani will get free publicity daily, particularly by the government-owned Doodardarshan showing where his yatra was. What a waste it is of taxpayers' money? The Home Ministry has also taken upon itself the responsibility of security which the Deputy Prime Minister is entitled to. An official plane would have been cheaper. I am surprised that the Election Commission has stopped the use of plane but found no fault with the yatra which would cost the government a packet. The comment by

instances for comparison. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee says that their agenda is development. But his party's chief Venkaiah Naidu says that the BJP has not given up the demand for raising the temple at the site where the Babri Masjid stood before demolition.

Till a few days ago, the BJP talked of two options: the court's decision or the agreement between Hindus and Muslims. Suddenly, a third option has been added -- an act by Parliament. It should not come as a surprise because the RSS has been suggesting this for some time now. It appears that the idea has come after the BJP has convinced itself on the basis of several surveys that

regional party in Andhra Pradesh which is bigger than Germany. The point to ponder over is why the BJP is advocating the two-party system. Were this to happen, the BJP believes, it would get power at the Centre automatically when the Congress would lose. Strange the BJP, which ran the combination of 24 regional parties so well, should ask for a two-party system. I do not think that the elimination of regional parties is in the interest of India polity. They represent local aspirations. In the absence of decentralisation of power, there is no other way for the state parties to have their say at New Delhi. A diverse society of ours is dependent on consensus. Jawaharlal Nehru's first government after

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

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

We as a nation...

Bangladesh is a democracy but the atmosphere prevailing in our country doesn't seem so. We see corruption in every sector. We have had fairly elected governments for the past thirteen years, but our mentality has not changed much. Whoever assumes power becomes conspicuously rich but the fate of poor people remains almost the same. Dhaka city has become the centre of all kinds of social amenities. Session jam is prevalent in public universities. Those in the opposition repose their faith in negative politics as they do not have the ability to face the government in parliament or in the court. Nepotism is also prevalent in every sector.

Our culture is waning because of the intrusion of Bollywood films and western life-style.

Tawhid Shams Chowdhury
English Department, BRAC University

Corruption

Corruption has become an acknowledged phenomenon in Bangladesh. International watch-

dogs, political parties and even the Bangladesh government are aware of corruption. One bold step that the Bangladesh government can take to curb this corruption epidemic is initiate Electronic Government.

Electronic governance will make government procedures more transparent to general public. This will significantly reduce corruption. For example, if the procedures for getting a land phone line are completed through the Internet there will not be any middleman who you have to bribe! The government can certainly initiate a pilot project like this.

Maksood Mohiuddin
Software Consultant, Atlanta, GA

Who defeated whom?

We celebrate 16 December, as it is our Victory Day, victory over Pakistani despots. We feel proud, we want to show the world that no oppressor can ever survive. But today I feel that we made a great mistake because we have not won the war, nor it ended on 16 December. Instead, the war ended on 14 March and Pakistan won its match. After killing the bright

intellectuals of our country the Pakistanis might have celebrated their victory.

Today we are a disillusioned nation. The Pakistanis have made us intellectually cripple and the fundamentalists have raised their heads and are attacking free thinkers like Humayun Azad.

Rifat Mahbub
DU

Bank loan

Recently we took BOI registration for a joint venture composite textile industry with Canadian investment. The cost of the project is US \$ 5.5 million. CIDA will also provide grant for one year to two expatriate staffers for technical support. Canadian investment is 25% plus technical cooperation plus guaranteed 100% buy back and the bank loan is to be refunded in five years. One local director shall have one year operational and management training in Canada. The dying and knitting machines are 2 to 4 years old which will be purchased from Canada at 15 times less than the prices of new equipment to ensure that the project will be more viable and competitive. It

can create 1250 jobs and the yearly export turnover is estimated at Tk. 93.35 crores.

Having all these benefit and positive project feasibility, the entrepreneurs had obvious hope to get faster project financing from our local banks. Moreover, the Bangladesh Bank (BB) and the finance ministry often issue public statements that the banks have huge unutilised funds as they do not get good projects. We approached some of the banks, but they did not show any interest to finance the project.

We hope the BB and the finance ministry will look into our case which will also help them understand that there is a big gap between the theory and practice.

Emdad Ul Haq
New Baily Road, Dhaka

Biman's decision

I am amused to read in The Daily Star internet edition that Biman (March 9) Bangladesh is contemplating to buy 2 F28s and at the same time selling one or two of their own fleet, which are still flying, at a much lower price than

the negotiated purchase price. If they are lucky they might get back the same ones which they are selling with perhaps some addition and extra colours. It will ensure at least that the new planes, like the old ones, will fly.

I guess high tech buying and selling is like that and for common men like me it will not be fair to pass any comments. Besides, I don't fly within Bangladesh because, apart from other considerations, it is very costly compared to other modes of transportation. I have only one concern. Unfortunately, I live right under the flight path of ZIA, just over a hundred meters or so from the railway track on the city end of the airport in a very crowded area. The F28s are the noisiest of all the aircraft which operate from ZIA. Some times they are noisier than the giant 747s.

When the planes take off, specially the noisy F28s, my little cottage starts shaking and the birds, which have built nests on trees in and around my house, fly away in fear of hell breaking loose on them. Some of them, however, have got used to it like me and my neighbours, with the passage of

time. During the season when my berry tree is in full bloom the very low approach of the jets, when they land from our end, cause loss to my berry crop.

I only hope Biman doesn't procure something noisier than the ones they are now flying.

Fayaz Khan
One-e-mail

Sorry, Dr. Azad

After hearing about the brutal attack on Dr. Azad, I am prompted to write about a similar incident which involved me although not as deadly as the attack on Dr. Azad. This happened in Nov 03, in my very own car park. I reside in an apartment building of which I volunteer to manage the maintenance of the car park. One fateful night at around 11:00pm, I was informed by my security guards that a number of unknown persons were trying to enter our premises in order to park a motorcycle, (probably which was stolen). Well, they were six in number, who had already entered my car park by the time I reached there. And as soon I refused them to park their bike in our premises, they swooped on me

and indiscriminately assaulted me and my security guards. And when they chased me up our stairwell, I knocked on some of my neighbours' doors, but sadly they were pretending to be fast asleep and nobody came to my rescue. I called the police after they left and surprisingly the police were at my door in about 7 minutes. They advised me to lodge a report with them the following day. But I was advised by my friends and colleagues not to go to the police as the persons who attacked me were from my neighbourhood and they would harass and intimidate me for reporting the incident to the police and also I would have to pay the police in order for them to take any sort of action. As the attackers belonged to the ruling party student front, I requested a colleague (who's brother is a friend of an influential leader) to intervene and many promises were made but till date nothing has been done. I have to see my attackers nearly every day on my return from work.

So, the point of me narrating this incident is to tell Dr. Azad and his family that he will not get any justice, rather his attackers will move around freely and his attack

will become just another statistic in time. My frustration now knows no limit, as we are at a point when we don't know who to turn to for justice and it feels like our backbone has been broken. My father fought and died for this country in 1971, the only ironic consolation comes from the fact that now we are not being oppressed and attacked by external forces but our very own countrymen.

JA
Tejgoan, Dhaka

Unbecoming of a minister

The state minister for education meted out physical punishment to an SSC examinee and at the same time shouted at a teacher-investigator. I came to learn from the national news on Sunday night (6th March) that he even expelled that student as well as the teacher.

If the teachers fail to perform their duties, there are set procedures to take action against them.

A teacher
On e-mail