

Ties with Vietnam

After impetus, momentum needed

VIETNAMESE President Tran Duc Luong departed from Dhaka yesterday leaving a note of shared optimism: Hanoi-Dhaka relationship has been set on an expansionary course with the potential for enormous benefit to both sides.

A quiet economic revolution has taken place in war-ravaged Vietnam which is as reconstructive in material terms as it has been radical in fervour. But in none of it has Hanoi compromised its basic policy ownership and indigenous orientation.

The macro-economic institutions like the central bank, for one, have attuned themselves to the demands of an open-door policy without losing out on time-honoured homegrown philosophies, societal commitments and fair practices. Bureaucratic efficiency coupled with work ethic in the industries has earned the country a good deal of positive reputation overseas in the recent years.

The result is for all to see: Vietnam has turned out to be one of the favoured destinations for FDIs in the region.

We need to exchange notes with Hanoi. And, we have had a responsive Vietnamese leadership as is evidenced by President Tran Duc Luong's just-concluded visit to Bangladesh leading a massive 98-member delegation including 42-business representatives. That is also a true measure of importance that Vietnam attaches to Bangladesh four countries away from Dhaka -- to our east. This must be seen as an extended reciprocation of our 'Look East' policy after we have already evinced interest in it from Myanmar and Thailand. Now it obliges us to take the policy forward with substance.

Agriculture is our main interest in Vietnam. Their methods of farming, organisation and marketing are worth studying. They are a successful rice exporter, something we can take a cue from, after having reached domestic sufficiency in food production. Our emphasis on agro-processing industries makes their expertise in the field relevant for us. There can be cooperation in the garments sector also in view of the post-MFA scenario. They have shown keen interest in our pharmaceuticals, ceramics and a wide range of EPZ products.

We welcome the protocols signed; but for a true maturing of our relationship we need to enter into joint venture projects graduating from what is now simply two-way trading.

Rape victim

Another suicide, another eye-opener

IT is extremely disquieting to learn that a rape victim committed suicide in Noakhali, after having been denied justice at a village arbitration meeting. The girl took her life as she was not allowed to speak and the rapist was not awarded the punishment he deserved.

Similar incidents have been reported from different places quite a few times in the recent past. Crime against women is rising while its 'containment' is still restricted to condemnation and expression of sympathy for the victims, or government pledge to be tough on the criminals. The eve teasers and rapists are taking advantage of an inadequate social response to the issue and lax enforcement of the law, to top it off.

It is a sad truth that the women in the most vulnerable group cannot always even seek legal aid. They have to depend on so-called arbitration often dominated by village headmen or religious leaders not motivated or competent enough to judge the gravity of such crimes. When a rape victim commits suicide out of a sense of anguish, the crime committed against her amounts to a culpable homicide. However, poverty and helplessness of the victim's family in the face of intimidation often stand in their way of seeking justice.

Village arbitration has traditionally been a reliable platform for settling disputes. But it is being increasingly abused by local influentials. The village headmen's inability or unwillingness to mete out justice was reflected in the latest case in which they thought that only 20 lashes were a punishment for such a grave crime.

So a change in outlook alongside tightening the noose of the law are needed to stop oppression on women. Society must not look upon a rape victim as another hapless woman falling prey to beastly lechery; rather it must come forward to create the conditions in which women would feel secure. To begin with, it has to be ensured that the perpetrators of this crime do not go unpunished.

Pak army attacked Joydevpur on 19 March 1971



NURURDIN MAHMUD KAMAL

President Ziaur Rahman (then Lt Colonel of a victorious army), the speech was a green signal for the nine-month long liberation war that started on 26 March 1971.

Although the Pak army suddenly disrupted the transmission of the speech, the full text had to be transmitted on the following day i.e. 8 March 1971. The people got the message and a total non-cooperation movement that began on 1 March intensified. Sheikh Mujib's Dharmodhikri residence (at Road No. 32) virtually became a

Nevertheless, the situation was explosive, the atmosphere was charged. In this tension-ridden time, nothing seemed to have the faintest ray of hope for any settlement. The non-cooperation movement gained such an unprecedented success that it was only within the limits of the cantonments that Pakistan existed. With the exception of random shots here and there in the early part of March 1971, killing of unarmed civilians continued. However, very interesting though, no arrest was made of the top Awami League leaders. President Yahya Khan

Morshed and Lt Ibrahim always rejuvenate my enthusiasm about Mukti Juddha. These officers were promoted to Major General except ASM Nasim who became Lt General and the seventh Chief of Staff, Bangladesh Army, 2 East Bengal Regiment during the war (perhaps in September 1971) was upgraded to a brigade and was named S-Force and I found myself deployed to Sector-3 (a mixed unit of guerrilla freedom fighters and regular army).

Before the main story of 19 March, a brief background of the Bengal

attack on Joydevpur population (as well as 2 East Bengal elements), was to give them a lesson as they were protesting against the Pakistan army convoy that arrived from Dhaka cantonment. In fact, a strong armed contingent led by Brig Jahzeb Arbab Khan made their way to Joydevpur to disarm the troops of 2 East Bengal Regiment (a mixed Bangalee and West Pakistani troops with majority Bangalees and a Bangalee commander). This was a classic example of the military junta's plan to test the strength of the Bangalee dominated unit. Brig. Arbab expected, as a

killed and several others injured. The skirmish continued for about twenty minutes. Finally, Brig Arbab could escape with his troops.

The 2 East Bengal Regiment (for that matter any Bangalee regiment) thus got its first exposure of a frontal military clash with the enemy (Pak army), before the full-scale genocide that began on 25 March 1971. During 19th to 25th March the battalion had a formal change in command (from Lt. Colonel Masood, a Bangalee officer to Lt Col Rakib, though a Bangalee by birth, he remained a dubious character for three days up to 28 March and ultimately managed to escape and report back to the Pak army as a loyal officer). From 28 March, the battalion did foresee their future under command of Maj KM Saifullah, then second in command of 2 East Bengal. He led his unit successfully throughout the war of liberation and reached with his small scout contingent on the day Pakistan army surrendered in Dhaka. The Major, during the war, was promoted to the rank of Lt. Colonel to command a brigade starting in September 1971.

The drama that was begun on 19 March by 57 division of Pak Army came to a gloomy and sad end (for them) on 16 December 1971. After about nine months, the former Commanding Officer of the 2 East Bengal (Lt Col Safiullah) was invited by 57 mountain division of the Allied Force to attend the signing ceremony of a well-deserved victory. The victory, however, came too soon. The enemies were not crushed. Yet, the people of Bangladesh witnessed a defeat of Pakistani army in a theatre of war with a record of disgraceful genocide of the innocent people of East Bengal in 1971. A mammoth crowd, happy with joy of victory, arrived at Ramna Race Course (now Shuhrawardi, Udyan) to express solidarity once again (after 7 March 1971). It was indeed a day of rejoicing, a day of victory of the people of Bangladesh. But the price was high indeed. In the words of an eminent philosopher, "If blood is the price of people's right to independence, Bangladesh has over paid."

Columnist Nuruddin Mahmud Kamal is a Mukti Juddha.

CHRONICLE

As the events took a dangerous turn the Brigadier became furious. Two civilians got killed and several others injured. The skirmish continued for about twenty minutes. Finally, Brig Arbab could escape with his troops... The 2 East Bengal Regiment (for that matter any Bangalee regiment) thus got its first exposure of a frontal military clash with the enemy (Pak army), before the full-scale genocide that began on 25 March 1971.

parallel government house where from policy directives began to emanate and the entire Bangalee nation, with no exception, responded by offering unqualified support to Sheikh's authority they accepted with their heart and soul.

Pushed to the extreme, the people organised meetings, protested against the military regime that conquered its own country (Pakistan), first in 1958 and then in 1969. Over the years, resentments grew, which peaked in March 1971. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman (popularly known as Sheikh Mujib) gave voice to the gagged throat of Bangalees and demanded equal treatment for the people. The rulers (Pakistan army) did not appreciate the idea. They wanted to stop Sheikh Mujib and the people. Clashes were imminent. The first such clash before the beginning of the War of Liberation took place at Joydevpur, about 35 kilometers from Dhaka. This was the first encounter between the unarmed people of East Bengal and well-armed troops that came from Dhaka cantonment.

The leaked out news of 19 March must have alerted both the Bangalee leadership as well as the military commanders. The latter were already confined to the various garrisons since 7 March, 1971, the day of *disobedience* expressed loud and clear at Ramna Race-course in Dhaka. In the midst of hundreds of thousands strong crowd (highest ever assembled in a public meeting in Dhaka), the unchallenged leader of East Bengal, Sheikh Mujib's thundersounding charade subdued the roaring crowd who swayed like the waves. With the spontaneous magic slogan *Joi Bangla* the crowd began to disperse with the Sheikh. His measured speech, not more than five hundred words, still resonates in the ears of our people. In the words of Shaheed

offered an apparently innocent proposal for negotiation between the government (army) and the people of East Bengal. On the face of Sheikh Mujib's announcement that he was taking over the administration of East Pakistan from the clutches of Martial Law (please see the author's article 'A parallel government up to 25 March 1971', published in the DS on 18 March 2004), Yahya, on March 15, flew in Dhaka with a big assembly of Generals and policy planners of Pakistan. The negotiation continued between 15 and 24 March, 1971. In the pageantry of negotiations, Bhutto's absence was conspicuously felt. Soon, he flew in Dhaka and joined the negotiation that ended in a fiasco by 25 March 1971 as if the mock negotiation needed his presence to accomplish the target.

Be that as it may, I always have an indefinable feeling of joy in the narrations unfolding the events of 19 March. The uncertainties and anxieties of four dramatic hours (between 12-30 pm and 4-30 pm) in particular always rekindle my memory whenever I talk of the heroes of 2 East Bengal Regiment in particular and liberation war in general.

My sentiment, heart and soul are deeply attached to the 2 East Bengal Regiment because I was inducted into the unit in the Sylhet area during the initial phase of our liberation war as a civilian staff officer. The memories of the war and the association with the valiant freedom fighters such as Major KM Saifullah (later Major General, first Chief of Army Staff, Bangladesh), Major Moinul Hossain Chowdhury, Capt ASM Nasim, Capt Azizur Rahman, Lt Helal

Regiment that faced the wrath of Pak army would be interesting. The imposing century old palace at Joydevpur was turned into a citadel that garrisoned the 2 East Bengal Regiment, popularly known as Junior Tiger. I was told that during the rising political crisis in the months after the general election in late 1970s many unusual happenings influenced the minds of the Bangalee officers and troops. They pinned their hopes and aspirations on Sheikh Mujib and firmly believed that as the leader of the majority party (in the general election), he would lead the country. At one point President Yahya emphatically declared Sheikh Mujib Rahman as the "future Prime Minister of Pakistan." On February 27, 2 East Bengal was assigned the task to enforce law and order at Mymensingh and Tangail. Two companies of the battalion were deployed there. The battalion HQ with the rest of the troops remained at Joydevpur, which was part of a clever move by the Pak army. The actual motive that worked behind this seemingly discordant order was perhaps to screen off the Bangalee troops from the main-stream of activities that was to follow shortly afterwards. With the gradual process of decimated deployment, the battalion would be reduced in its capability and effectiveness to a large extent. But beyond the perceptible, in this deployment, there laid the hidden seeds of freedom to defect in full strength when the time was ripe. Pakistan army's bad motive latter turned out as a great advantage of 2 East Bengal Regiment.

As part of the plan, 57 Brigade's

matter of routine, the Bangalee unit to observe military discipline and cooperate with the senior commander without any hesitation. What he perhaps couldn't appreciate was that the Bangalee officers and troops had already heard the rumour about disarming the battalion; even civilian population of Joydevpur anticipated a clash. So, they were prepared to face the invaders. The historic confrontation thus took an interesting shape.

When the 57 Brigade troops arrived, the civilian population of Joydevpur surrounded the entire area. They obstructed the movement of outside troops. To remove the barricades, Brig Arbab's order to "use maximum force" revealed the attitude that he had in mind towards the Bangalee civil population. With seventy strong jaws of 32 Punjab, the invader was invincibly armed with the 7.62 millimeter Chinese light machine guns (LMGs), the automatic fire power of almost an entire infantry battalion. So, from a position of strength Brig Arbab thought "nobody can stop us." Even with one third of the total battalion troops, 2 East Bengal Regiment located at Joydevpur was ready to face all eventualities. On the arrival of the Brigadier, the crowd of about 50,000 grew restless and a commotion ensued. Tension mounted, Brig Arbab ordered "fire and clear the barricade." Major Moinul Hossain Chowdhury, as per instruction, opened fire but in his order he added in Bangla "fire below" or "fire over the head." Meantime, the crowd also opened fire. As the events took a dangerous turn the Brigadier became furious. Two civilians got

Haiti in turmoil again: Who foments the trouble?

AMM SHAHABUDDIN

THE history of the Caribbean island Haiti, from 1980s to 1990s is not just a pleasant trip down the two decades. It is filled with unpleasant twists and turns and full of turmoil, with deep-laid conspiracy to kill democracy and to make room for autocratic one-man rule, backed by vested interests. But there was one man, Aristide, who had been fighting since 1980s against heavy odds to put Haiti apparently on a democratic track. He had played a vital role in a popular uprising that had put an end to the decades of dictatorship, making himself a role model of Haiti's democratic movement.

In 1991, Aristide was elected by the people of Haiti as their first President, opening in their minds new hopes about their future. But, unfortunately, Aristide could not last long. The 'moles' who were working under the patronage of their distant godfathers, again became active and Aristide was ousted in a *coup d'état* within a couple of months. But in 1994, Aristide was brought back to power, ironically, riding on the waves of invasion launched by US forces, proving once again that America knows well how to enjoy the 'cream' in a troubled situation. And the same America forced Aristide, who was elected by the people for the second term as president in 2000 and was scheduled to complete term in 2006, to resign as president and literally 'kidnapped' him to the African state of Dominican Republic, putting him under guard of French forces! But the question remains as to who again fanned the rebellion, led by an ex-police chief, to oust an elected president on charges of corruption, misrule and abuse of human rights?

This reminds us of the sad story of Panamanian President Noriega who was brought to power by America as their most 'beloved blue-eyed boy', but that lasted as long as he served US interests. Noriega fell from US

grace when he started showing arrogance to the US Administration by refusing to allow America's continued presence and authority in the Panama canal. He was then literally kidnapped from his presidential palace by the US commandos and was brought to America for trial on charges of drug trafficking and the elected president of a sovereign UN member state is still rotting in a US prison.

Big powers' double game

policy of two world powers was more prominent during the cold war period, when the world was divided into two clear-cut parts, one managed by the West headed by America, the other headed by the now defunct Soviet Union. But they were always on the look-out how to outwit the other. In this power game, Africa was the most suitable playground for them. But after the sudden demise of the Soviet Union, America became the overall champion of all that news surveys.

wind blows.

Perhaps the US administration is still being haunted by the nerve-shaking humiliation that US forces had to face in Somalia where one dead US soldier was lynched on the streets of Mogadishu by the anti-US demonstrators and the ghastly scene was televised all over the world. America, particularly President Bush, should thank his stars, that the US forces had not so far faced such humiliation in Iraq. US forces had to leave Somalian soil within the time-

resign and flee the country. (Aristide alleged that France, the former colonial ruler, "colluded" with America to oust him in a sort of *coup d'état*, adding that he had been a victim of "political kidnapping" and was "forced out of the country at gun-point".)

But why such manoeuvring on the part of saviours of democracy and human rights? Didn't America support a dictator like Saddam in the 1980s to achieve its ends in Iran? Did it not support Said Barre, another

Popular Party (PP), led by its outgoing PM Aznar, had been badly moulded by the anti-Iraq war Socialist Party, led by its PM-elect Zapatero, should serve as an eye-opener. As they say, a word to the wise is enough. Mr Zapatero had already announced that Spanish troops deployed in Iraq by his predecessor would be withdrawn by June 30 next. He also dubbed as 'disaster' the war and occupation of Iraq. It would undoubtedly cause much hiccups in many of the US-led coalition forces now working in Iraq. And, as if to add fuel to the fire, has come the statement by the former UN weapons inspector Hans Blix, in a recent press interview in Rome that the war on Iraq waged by US "has not put an end to terrorism in the world," on the contrary, it has given it "a boost." America "violated international principles" and "weakened" the UN. Such adverse events, as occurred in Spanish elections, and damaging comments by Blix might cause many bricks to fall from the US-built coalition and even NATO umbrella.

But everything has its limit. Thus far and no further. You will have to call it a day at a certain point. Otherwise you will have to reap the whirlwind because you had already sown the seeds of wind. The saying that as you sow, so you reap, is not a myth. This is what had happened to America in the past because of political follies, committed by its over-adventurous leadership. So, what had happened in Somalia or Vietnam, and now happening in Iraq, might be repeated in Bush's new peace-adventures in Haiti. The alarm signal is already there. But will Bush look beyond the horizon of his presidential election campaign? Much depends to what extent he wants to stretch unilaterally the newly-found empire of the 21st century. Will Kerry be successful in stopping the desperate man to save the world from another catastrophe?

The out-come of the just-concluded elections in Spain in which pro-American conservative

dictator in Somalia to reach goal? Or, in Afghanistan, did it not spend billions of dollars in promoting the now-hated Taliban to oust the Russian forces from there?

Instead, could have supported the elected President Aristide they were at all interested in preserving peace and stability in Haiti, thereby putting down the chaos and destruction caused by the rebel forces who, at the behest of somebody else, wanted to re-establish their authority in Haiti, as they had done earlier. By doing this way, America could have earned the good name of a saviour of democracy and at the same time would have gained a strong foothold there as a friend and not as an enemy. But what is happening today is not at all a healthy sign for America. Thousands of pro-Aristide demonstrators had now hit the streets of the capital, Port-au-Prince and some other parts of the country, demanding immediate return of their elected President and departure of "US occupation" forces.

The out-come of the just-concluded elections in Spain in which pro-American conservative

political illiterates!

A Mawaz

Political illiterates!

We are grumbling about electricity shortage leading to frequent load shedding during summers. Unfortunately, we do not see the wastage and misuse of electricity in urban areas. I have noticed the shopping centres with dazzling lights in much excess of their requirements. The gold shops, sweet shops and other market places where buyers throng during the peak load period are wasting so much electricity. I do not understand a sweet shop or gold shop using scores of tube lights to show their products, whereas a buyer with genuine intent could see them with the light of even two bulbs. The big shopping complexes are illuminated inside and outside in a way as if some celebrations are going on.

I hope the persons in charge will look into the matter and take the necessary steps to stop wastage of electricity.

Mohammad Alauddin
Dhaka.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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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.

South Asia--western infiltration

What should be the role of the masses, and their local and national leaders? Surely the latter are not going to let down their countries and cultures? Begging must have some moral bandwidth.

The first priority of the United States is to look after its own interests, internally and globally. That means, according to one section of world opinion, containing the so-called terrorists who blew up the WTO building in NY. Many think it is an anti-Islamic stance, as the Muslims constitute the second largest group of humans on this earth. If that were not enough, the

US policy. Some rich Muslim nations in the ME serve their Western masters, but why Iran, Iraq, Egypt and others were taken to task (in the past and currently), for not toeing the line?

"Globalisation" and "WMD" are propaganda systems for neutralisation of local policy stunts. Now Pakistan will face what Turkey did by joining the European club. To appease India, the perfect alibi is now available: India and Pakistan to start a disarmament programme to raise the development expenditures in poverty alleviation. There is another bait for mighty India: a US base for US products and ser-

vices for marketing in vast Asia—a counterbalance to cheap products from China, another billion-population country in Asia. Surely the China watchers are busy analysing the fall-outs.

Plainly, it is the materialistic approach to rich dollars—capture the potential markets, specially the energy sectors. How Bangladesh will escape the western chase after her gas reserves? The Indian regime in New Delhi is realising day by day the future implications of the policies of the