

Tampering with history

Dangerous game, go back to the original

WE are at a loss to comprehend the logic of creating another controversy regarding proclamation of independence of Bangladesh, as if there are not enough controversies already to divide the nation. It is our view that the latest controversy that has been kicked up by new insertions related to the proclamation of independence has very little to do with history and everything to do with politics.

The insertion lacks historical propriety and exhibits scant regard for truth. This stands vindicated by the fact that the authentication committee of the "Muktijuddher Dalilpatro" formed by this BNP government has distanced itself from the change brought about in the shape of 'a new chapter' on the proclamation of Bangladesh's independence.

It may be recalled that late president Zia had entrusted the task of compiling documents of our Liberation movement to a committee with late Hasan Hafeezur Rahman as its chairman in 1977. The documents were compiled in fifteen volumes and first published in 1982. Zia was assassinated in May 1981 so that most of the work was completed during the time of a BNP government.

Zia had never claimed the pedestal during his lifetime that his followers are trying to place him on after his death. It is a pity his followers cannot emulate the sagacity displayed by Zia. It is regrettable that what has been accepted without a question during the last twenty-two years after its publication is suddenly up for political tinkering.

Even more regrettable is that the proclamation of Mujib has been omitted in its entirety from the current edition. Not only that, we are now having to confront with something new which is that Zia made the first announcement on the night of 25th March. All this is a travesty of truth.

There cannot be two opinions though, that Mujib's proclamations of independence as well as Zia's announcement, are facts that occupy a pride of place in our history. In juxtaposing these two events we neither serve history nor our posterity.

The BNP government has a track-record of looking at history from a politically warped angle. Their distorted view got reflected through some interpolations made in the textbooks, and now we have an alteration to the original and well-established documentation of history which had been duly authenticated by the Constitution.

We demand an immediate cessation of such suicidal and divisive politicisation of history. No one should try to make a political game of history which belongs to the whole nation.

Let good sense prevail and the government revert back to the original document.

Blanket threat to journalists

How much worse can it get?

THE latest threat to 22 journalists in various parts of the country, including one in the capital, should not come as a surprise. Not only because getting threats has almost become a routine affair for the journalists in the southwestern part of Bangladesh, but also because the authorities' failure to trace the sources of such threats seems to have encouraged the perpetrators even more. Journalists have come under attack, both physically and otherwise, many a time in the past. They have always faced the wrath of a segment of the society whose criminality they fearlessly unmasked from time to time. But the alarming thing now is that the threats are turning into fatalities.

The authorities can not keep their eyes shut to the trend any longer. The barbaric killing of Humayun Kabir Balu and Manik Saha in Khulna should have been eye-openers to the magnitude of risk-taking by serious journalists on their daily rounds of work. The journalists simply do their jobs. And if that goes against the interests of a certain group, should attempts to mute their voices with threats and intimidation be allowed to go unpunished?

The government pledges to bring perpetrators to book whenever reacting to violent acts against journalists, but the assurances are hardly fulfilled. It never tires of saying that the journalists are working with total freedom. But how can professional freedom be exercised without a minimum guarantee for physical safety? The most frustrating part of the experience is that no punishment has yet been meted out to either the threat-givers or actual murderers.

We have reasons to believe that the police can catch these criminals if they will to do so. The question before the government is: whether the criminals should be allowed to continue to intimidate us, make us feel more insecure than we already are, or we should be allowed to do our jobs without any fear of reprisal from any quarter whatsoever.

Strategic dimension of Indo-Bangladesh relations



M. ABDUL HAFIZ

India got involved in Bangladesh liberation movement... also for meeting India's own political and strategic interests.

-- JN Dixit (Liberation and Beyond p-270)

INDIA'S redoubtable National Security Adviser did not however elaborate those politico strategic interests in his book; neither have those been conclusively known from any other source. They are also obfuscated by myriad other bilateral issues of day to day urgency: the border, migration, trade and so on and related problems connected with them. As a result we are left only with conjecture to trace out strategic strand, if any, in our relations.

Viewed, however, against a bigger time frame of contemporary history few can miss the developments -- that could have been catalyst for a major political change in the region. The decade of 1960 had rather been significant in this regard. In 1962

India suffered humiliating defeat in the hands of Chinese and the myth of Hindi-Chini fraternity exploded -- in favour of her arch rival Pakistan which moved closer to China by setting her border disputes with the latter. Earlier Pakistan already entered into defence pact with the US.

In the meantime, India's military setback in NEFA, a major battle field in Sino-Indian conflict, ever

Pakistan -- Indian physical problem on ground was no less real, especially in her North Eastern region the geo-politics of which was indeed intriguing.

India's experience in the area stretching over 255,085 square kilometres of tribal lands populated by the people of Tibeto-Mongoloid stock with primordial loyalty to their ethnic norms has been anything but savoury. Truly speaking the region

the moment India stepped into this deceptively tranquil region at Independence. It only sparked the emotions of the tribesmen who disputed India's control of their land which they argued, was colonised by the British like India had been. With the British transfer of power the sovereignty ought to be restored to the people of respective territories, they asserted. Ever since the Indian rule is resisted in its turbulent North

Ahoms) from the area failed.

It is thus no wonder that since the partition the region is India's Achilles' heel and Bangladesh with its sheer juxtaposition holds a key to lessening India's predicament. The partition of 1947 had virtually separated the North-East from India's heartland which is connected to the region by less than one per cent of its external border. To make things worse for the North-

making with regard to the latter's support to Bangladesh liberation movement, there are however enough pointers to suggest that India did want to get rid of Pakistanis hobnobbing in the area and foist a dispensation in its place friendly to India. Whether that dream of India has been fulfilled or not can constitute another debate, but the policies pursued by India since Bangladesh's independence do demonstrate her eagerness to tighten her grip on the troubled North-East. To that end India tried for opening up trade corridor, transit facility of goods or their transshipment including turning Chittagong a free port and held out baits of enormous profit for Bangladesh out of them. In fact the underlying idea of 25 years friendship treaty between India and Bangladesh was to allow India some leeway in the area involving Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, however, persistently refuses to be drawn into the sub-region's power game and is reluctant to put her finger in the North-East's cauldron. But India does have a stake in Bangladesh making some concessions and continues to woo Bangladesh. Until an Indian quest for some solution is achieved it will remain a factor in bilateral relations and reappear again and again in some guise or other in our inter-state ties.

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PERSPECTIVES

Bangladesh persistently refuses to be drawn into the sub-region's power game and is reluctant to put her finger in the North-East's cauldron. But India does have a stake in Bangladesh making some concessions and continues to woo Bangladesh. Until an Indian quest for some solution is achieved it will remain a factor in bilateral relations and reappear again and again in some guise or other in our inter-state ties.

intensifying insurgency in India's North-East, the spread of naxalite movement in West Bengal and Pakistan's dabbling in the sub-region's backyard -- all combined to obsess India's policy-makers of a looming threat from across the Himalaya -- greater in intensity that it was in 1962. In the context a China-Pakistan nexus and growing Sino-American rapprochement could not but figure prominently in India's security calculus. Although a part of India's anxiety had been the product of the sub-continent's politics, Indo-Pak rivalry and alleged extra regional linkages of the neighbours -- particularly of

did not exactly belong to classical India the world is familiar with from its well recorded history of over two thousand years; neither did the area and lives of its myriad tribes ever conform to the civilisational pattern of any period of Indian history. The imperial reaches even of the great Mouryas, the Guptas and the Mughals could not encompass them. Notwithstanding the efforts of North Indian and Bengali Brahmins right from the Ahom period neither Sanscritisation could strike its roots among the tribals nor could Aryanisation penetrate into the area.

The problem began right from

East now comprised of seven tribal and semi-tribal states popularly known as seven sisters.

As a matter of fact the North East has been a great crossroad -- its valleys and passes being witness to the centuries of migration as tribal people moved southward from across the Himalaya. It represents an ethno-cultural frontier bearing the distinct traces of Mongoloid heritage. It has also been a complex transition zone of linguistic, racial and ethno-cultural stream. Obviously enough all efforts of integrating the region with the rest of India right from the Ahoms down to British who dislodged them (the

East the main arteries of its communications through railway and inland water as well as the traditional market and entrepot Chittagong were all lost after the partition. The limitation imposed on India by partition with regard to her grip on the North-East was further compounded by Pakistan's hostility and hobnobbing with the tribal rebels who were allegedly trained by Pakistanis in Chittagong Hill Tracts. (Naga rebel Dr. Phizo made his way to London through Dhaka with the help of Pakistanis).

It may be debatable whether the Pakistan factor in the North-East worked behind India's decision-

Needless crisis in NE Asia



M. B. NAQVI

writes from Karachi

IT is a triumph of Chinese diplomacy that both North Korea and the US have started giving hopeful signals. North Korea has let it be known that they are ready to freeze their nuclear programme, provided the US, Japan, South Korea, and the rest of the world ensure adequate economic aid to Pyongyang, especially food and fuel supplies. The US side has said it would consider giving economic aid, including food and fuel, provided North Korea stops its nuclear programme "irreversibly and transparently or verifiably". In theory, both want a peaceful resolution of the Nuclear Crisis on the Korean peninsula. Only, both will do the needful -- viz. Pyongyang will stop the nuclear programme in lieu of economic aid and the US will give the needed aid provided North Korea stops its nuclear programme on US terms -- when their terms are met or a compromise on them is arrived at.

Let's first note that what is being said on both sides is a great improvement over the deep freeze that had enveloped North Korea's few ties with the US and the rhetoric from either side was tough and unyielding. During the last few

years, the Chinese were able not only to hold several six power -- the China, the US, Russia, Japan, and the two Koreas -- conferences in Beijing, but have also succeeded in helping narrow the gap between the two adversaries, the US and North Korea. Now, there is an in-principle agreement between them -- provided the two sets of terms can be harmonised. Indeed face-to-face bilateral contacts have begun between the two less than friendly powers.

North Korea to the UN Security Council, how and why did the Bush government declare North Korea to be an evil power that was a threat to what Bush sometimes calls freedom and sometimes civilisation? Until late into 2002, the world was under the impression that North Korea was a loyal member of the international community which was abiding by the NPT terms to the general satisfaction of IAEA. American action was either a result of

effective deterrent to the US from dominating the whole world. This deterrence has now gone and Russia is now a more or less second-class power, though still quite considerable in its potential. But China's power -- that was so considerable in 1949-50 even in its most strained circumstances -- is now a rising star in the Asian firmament. Who can doubt that the geo-strategic considerations that compelled Mao to send his millions of half-hungry

a hyper-power, able to act unilaterally and preemptively if necessary, is true enough in a general sort of way. But the fact of the matter is that American's hyper-power has actually met with its first checkmate -- and in Asia where much the action is to be in the current and next decade.

The question recurs: why did the Bush government go back on the agreement that his predecessor, Bill Clinton's administration, had

this year. It is not merely "as you were" for the US to again accept broadly the same terms on which Clinton had made an agreement with Pyongyang. It will be after the US having threatened North Korea and the latter's audacious and spectacular defiance -- the first serious setback in Asia after so many initial successes in Central Asia. US successes in Central Asia are by no means definitive. The Shanghai Six are still active, if also rather unobtrusively and in a somewhat discreet manner. But the ultimate purpose of Shanghai Six is to reduce the US role -- and expected advantages -- in and from Asia by promoting local Asian cooperation. This discreet rivalry is a fascinating and subtle rearguard action by the Chinese and Russians. The Chinese and Russians lack the abundance of capital and military technology with which the US operates. Instead these two Asian giants have to rely on the mantra of self-reliance, hard work and Asian cooperation.

The Korean crisis will have a far-reaching impact on what happens in Central Asia in years to come. The rough outlines of an agreement that seem to be emerging for resolving this crisis will immensely strengthen and brighten the prestige of China, in the first place, while the US will have suffered a serious setback.

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PLAIN WORDS

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Compare this with early 2002, when US President George Bush put down North Korea as a member of the Axis of Evil and tore up the earlier agreement with Pyongyang under which the US and its friends, in addition to what Russia and China were doing, were giving it aid against its promise of not going ahead with its nuclear programme -- which promise was well kept while the aid supplies kept coming in. But when the Bush administration walked out of the agreement and stopped aid to North Korea, the latter adopted an audacious policy of walking out of Nuclear Proliferation Treaty, expelled the IAEA inspectors and told Americans that Pyongyang was building the bomb. That inaugurated a first-rate crisis that is only slowly being defused now.

A question arises: while the IAEA had not reported any wrongdoing by

exaggerated or alarmistic reports by American spies or it was a part of a huge policy of bluff that was aimed at browbeating North Korea into becoming less truculent towards the US and doing regionally what the US wanted. It is still inconceivable that the US actually wanted to go to war against North Korea again.

Going by the experience of Afghanistan and Iraq, the US would avoid war with the North like plague. For Iraq and Afghanistan are child's play compared to what resistance is to be encountered in North Korea. Few could have forgotten the 1950s war's experience or lessons.

North Korea's military capabilities -- not counting the nuclear dimension -- are in a vastly different class, but by no means superior to the US. Doubtless, in the 1940s and 1950s the Soviets were a big factor in international affairs that acted as an

troops to Korea to battle the Americans to a standstill that has been respected for 54 years will also force his successors to try and keep the US from making the Korean Peninsula its own backyard. Even the Russians may feel constrained to try to dissuade the US from active hostilities.

Geo-strategic compulsions are not being talked about. But all this has to be kept at the back of one's mind. All governments that feel concerned about North Korea, i.e. the six powers that sat on the recent Beijing Conferences, have all this in their minds. Indeed, this is how China has become the lead factor in this affair and the US has willingly conceded a place of honour at the high table to it where Korean affairs are concerned. This peep into recent history should correct many a perspective. The fact of the US being

signed? In terms of the current re-nouement, an expected agreement between the US and North Korea on much the same basic terms, under whatever format or language, it is likely to emerge finally, is being worked out. It looks in fact quite likely after another conference or may be two in Beijing. The original American decision could only have been the result of hubris and sheer arrogance. Bush government's conduct vis-à-vis North Korean crisis will be faulted by many sober Americans in days to come. True, North Korea will promise to verifiably not engage in bomb-making. But that is a position that goes back to the Clinton agreement with roughly the same liabilities for the US.

Many Americans are sure to ask tricky questions, if the new agreement comes before November

OPINION

Introducing seal of quality for shrimp industries

M. H. BARI

OUR export performance in shrimp industries is indeed highly appreciable. In 1973, there were only 15 shrimp industries and the export earnings were \$3.17 million. But the country earns \$297 million in 2002-2003 financial year exporting shrimp though having severe price fluctuation in the international market. Despite its spectacular growth and bright prospect our shrimp industry is saddled with various hurdles. As such it could not attain its expected level of growth.

Due to detection of some bacterial attack in our exported shrimp, the European Union imposed ban on import of frozen shrimp and fish from Bangladesh in July 1997 and advised the Bangladesh government to implement HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) system in shrimp industries for hygienically safe production of frozen food. For implementation of

the system by the shrimp industry the government along with the BFFEA (Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters Association) obtained experts' services from the USFDA, EU, FAO/WHO, SGS and others sources. The government promulgated Fish and Fish Products (Inspection and Quality Control) Rules in December 1997 to implement the programme.

The EU experts visited Bangladesh to inspect the arrangement made by Bangladesh. The experts were satisfied by the government/BFFEA efforts in this respect and the EU ban on import of frozen fish from Bangladesh was lifted in 1998. Now 51 shrimp industries of Bangladesh hold HACCP approval from the EU. After introducing HACCP system in shrimp industry the hygienic and sanitation condition of the factory improved significantly. As a result of which bacterial contamination in Bangladeshi frozen food reduced a minimum level and this was acclaimed internationally. It may

be mentioned here that export of frozen shrimp has increasing in volume and value day by day.

Despite relentless efforts for producing safe food there are some cases of bacterial attack in their products. By the blessings of our

is yearly losing about 10 per cent in respect of value from neighbouring countries.

These are the findings of ATPD experts for getting lower prices for our products:

1. Substitution of product

Bangladesh's shrimp industries are playing a significant role in the national economy. It produces about three per cent of global production of shrimp. Several million people in Bangladesh are directly or indirectly involved with shrimp industries. Bangladeshi shrimp having original texture and a mouth-watering taste has already been acclaimed in the world market.

media, this has got wide coverage in the newspapers which ultimately damaged our image in the country and abroad tremendously. On the other hand due to machination of some vested groups some allegation against Bangladesh shrimps products was raised. However it has to be admitted that HACCP system could not attain the desired goal due to ill-planned implementation. It is very sad that due to image problems Bangladesh

already inspected by buyer's representative.

2. Deliberate non-delivery of contracted shipments at agreed prices when market prices increase.

3. Shipping frequently not available as scheduled.

4. Not shipping contracted breakdown or size assortments.

5. Substitution of quality standards (2nd grade product labelled as 1st grade product).

6. Soft or broken shells included in 1st grade product.

7. Soaking shrimp for weight gain, chemicals used not declared.

8. Blending sizes -- not all shrimp in the declared size range fall within that size range.

9. Excessive neck or hanging meat by international standards.

10. Some exporters take non financial responsibility for rejected product.

11. Negotiating contracts 4 to 8 weeks ahead of shipping date leads to increased market risk and decrease in offer prices.

This finding does not bear the whole truth. Buyers also take the chance of circumstances and subsequently, cancelled contracts

or reduced prices yet we have to do something concrete for image building of Bangladesh in global market.

Experts opined that introduction of a seal of quality program with strict sanitary, environmental,

social and human rights standards is urgently needed to continue access of Bangladesh shrimp to the world market. Without such a standard, Bangladesh will face possible economic disaster as international buyers and consumers threaten sanctions because of pathogens found in shrimp and a failure to live up to internationally acceptable environmental, social and human rights standards. The country as a whole would pay a

high price for the failure to develop an internationally recognised Seal of Quality. It will guarantee buyers that our shrimp meet the hygiene, human rights, labour and environmental codes. This seal will be awarded to firm that meet the codes.

Actually the industry association that will police its member will own SOQ. This is a self policing the quality management. ATPD-II is untiringly working for introducing SSOQ (Shrimp Seal of Quality) programme for Bangladesh shrimps industries. It may be mentioned here that a USFDA team will visit Bangladesh in September this year to inspect the quality of exported shrimp and its infrastructure.

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shrimp having original texture and a mouth-watering taste has already been acclaimed in the world market. Bangladesh shrimp industries association BFFEA (Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association) are playing a pivotal role for the overall development of this sector. But the BFFEA, the main player of the sector, remains aloof from the prompters of SOQ. BFFEA strongly differs with the modalities of the SOQ prompters and believes that ultimately it will cause damage to the industry. A rift among the SOQ prompters and BFFEA will not be good for the industry. We also believe that without active participation of BFFEA, SOQ programme will not be successful. So, a united effort is very much urgent for saving Bangladesh shrimp industries.

The writer is a marketing director of a reputed seafood buying house and has been associated with shrimp industries of Bangladesh for more than 20 years.