

## The high migration cost damper

*Begs govt intervention, here and overseas*

ONE major, yet perhaps the least addressed, among causes for manpower export from Bangladesh dwindling of late is the rising cost of migration. The spotlight is usually on the so-called negative image of Bangladesh, shrinkage in overseas job market and a tendency in some traditionally importing countries towards natisation of their labour market.

While all of these are attributable, in parts, to the export slump, the single disincentive appears to be the high fees asked from the intending migrants.

Just how prohibitive the costs can be is gauged from the Korean Federation of Small Business awarding contracts to four recruitment agencies for 200 trainee employees from Bangladesh at a fee of Tk 1.92 lakh each but the agencies are reportedly charging Tk eight lakh each. Taka five lakh seems to be the minimum asking rate. Whereas only a few months back, a Bangladeshi worker would be charged Tk 1.4 to 1.7 lakh for a job in Saudi Arabia (salaried at Tk 5600 per month -- that too underpaid in the end), the rate has now shot up by Tk 70,000 to Tk 90,000 per head.

One can understand that the cost of ticket has increased overtime due to higher fuel price and that the dollar value has appreciated, but the kind of hike effected in the migration fees cannot be explained away in those terms at all.

These are high costs for the job-seekers who are mostly poor and have to mobilise the money by lending or selling family property. And if he would be lucky not to have been entrapped by a fake agent and have landed on a job, at the month's end he could be receiving less than even the paltry sum he had contracted for.

So, what happens if he has paid the high fees to get a job is that he desperately looks for raising the money he had spent to land abroad. He does part time job, or an odd job engaging himself in small trade or might switch jobs that strictly he had not been authorised to do under terms of the contract. He might be lured away by a local firm on a better offer, which the latter could afford because there was no plane fare or other costs to be paid for.

Since there are more seekers of job than there are jobs for, the recruitment agencies, both here and overseas, tend to exploit the situation by entering into an unhealthy competition to raise the migration fees. This is proving counterproductive for the sending and hosting countries and, perhaps no less, for the manpower export agencies who risk losing business in the end. It's time the governments in exporting and importing countries in consultation with representatives from the approved manpower agencies look into the whole issue of migration fees and bring these down to a realistic, affordable level.

## How dare!

*Barisal SI must be severely punished*

HOW can a government servant not show respect for the national anthem? If that government servant happens to be a police officer who is responsible for the implementation of the law of the land, then the episode becomes even more unbelievable. That is precisely what happened. During the Victory Day celebrations at the Shaheed Minar in Barisal the sub-inspector(SI) of the local thana kept on sitting while the rest of the crowd stood up during the playing of the national anthem.

Not only his act of disrespect but also the timing, venue and the occasion he chose to show it cannot be lost on any patriotic citizen of this country. It was no less an occasion than our victory and no less a place than the Shaheed Minar. When reminded by fellow participants of the event to stand up he had the audacity to reply that he was doing the right thing.

We are forced to demand his severe punishment if not his outright dismissal. We are convinced that he was making a political statement through his act and hence the home ministry should immediately investigate his background and the people he is in touch with. In addition the government must also ensure that such elements are sifted out and identified.

Only the other day the JMB threatened to blow up schools that play the national anthem and hoist the national flag. The obvious connection between the threat and the action of the SI cannot be lost on anybody who wants to see. Will the government?

RUMI AHMED writes from Milwaukee, Wisconsin

WHILE I agree, mostly, with Asif Saleh's recent post-editorial on the key responsibility of the ruling BNP for the rise of Islamic militancy in Bangladesh, and I support the demands laid forward by Saleh to the government, let's take a trip around Bangladeshi democracy.

By all basic political science rulings, democracy is always a joint venture of both the ruling and the opposition party. In Bangladeshi democracy, while ruling party, whoever they are, are not used to the idea of respecting and listening to the opposition, the opposition, I believe, has been doing a much worse job as the responsible partner.

Since the day after the election, the opposition has been demanding immediate resignation of the government. Now, in the aftermath of the attacks of the militants, apparently the only thing our opposition has to say is that the government has to resign.

Do our previous and possibly future prime minister and other ex-ministers and national leaders understand the implication of their demand? Don't they understand what an irresponsible demand it is?

Or is responsibility something that you can't live with in Bangladeshi politics?

Who will be the ultimate winner if the government has to fall after the militant bombing campaign? Why Awami League is so blinded by its lust for power that they simply don't see that, in the face of fledgling Islamic militancy, fall of the current government is the worst thing that could happen to Bangladesh.

Resignation of the government will reward the militants and encourage them to keep on doing their militancy. At the same time, uncertainty after the fall of government and lack of political authority will seriously hamper current anti-militant drive by the law enforcement agencies.

Is there any guarantee that the fall of BNP will stop the bombing campaign? If AL says so, won't it justify the past BNP-Jamaat allegations that AL was behind the bombings?

I also demand the government implement the four points raised by Asif Saleh. I believe they are all doable. Banning terrorist organizations is a must do. Bringing kaomi madrassas under government control is way overdue. Cleansing government machinery of terrorist sympathizers must happen. Foregoing alliance with Jamaat-Islami can also happen if BNP and AL

# The timeless victories



M ABDUL HAFIZ

ON 16 December of 1971 the world watched in total bewilderment the surrender of 96,000 strong occupation force of Pakistan, armed to its teeth, to Bangladesh-India joint command at the Race Course of Dhaka. The ignominy connected with the bizarre capitulation belonged entirely to Pakistan which apparently lacked guts of fighting to the last man and last round as was declared earlier by its redoubtable commander, General Niazi -- a World War II veteran. Belying his latest bravado of "tank over my chest," a visibly panicked Niazi vied for a ceasefire and anything beyond that to extricate himself and his compatriots from the morass. Known as shera (the lion) he, at the end, proved himself a bagpipe general. But what's about the credit, if any, for the

spectacular victory on the other side?

Justifiably there has never been officially any attempt to apportion the credit between the partners in arms -- for it was jointly achieved by Bangladesh and India who entered into an alliance to drive out the occupation force after the latter recognised Bangladesh. India's armed forces together with the liberation force (Mukti Bahini) of

with a surgical precision till the surrender ceremony. But how the Mukti Bahini guerillas, the phantom army of Bangladesh, were making unnerved the occupation forces is indeed a field still unexplored. Drawn from the ranks of ordinary public, the students, peasants and assorted political and social activists they not only withstood the 'shock and awe' of fateful night of 25 March and its aftermath, these

parallel can be drawn with Vietnam war the 30th anniversary of the end of which falls in the year 2005. For many reasons it bears striking resemblance with the conditions of Bangladesh in 1971. It will only be in the fitness of things to have a cursory glance at another timeless victory achieved by Vietnam after an immense suffering of its people. As the year 2005 is going to be out soon and Vietnam's epochal achieve-

of Dienbieu Phu.

At the end 'the fourth rate power' dragged Nixon to Paris to accept the DRV's (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) peace terms -- virtually the same that the US President arrogantly rejected earlier. This 'fourth rate power' so weakened the US that it was unable or unwilling to challenge North Korea's seizure of US' electronics laden intelligence ship 'Pueblo'. The 12 days' sav-

More or less in the same vein Pakistanis called us a non-martial race and Ayub Khan referred to us as a 'lesser breed' in his book. Enraged at our demand of a fair deal in the shape of a wider autonomy they unleashed a genocide -- the worst after the Nazi holocaust in Germany and perpetrated war crimes through loot, arson and rapes. But the verdict of the history is so fair, so stark that the perpetrators of bloodshed and immeasurable sufferings were soon visited by their nemesis. At the end they surrendered partly to those whom they earlier dismissed as 'miscreants.'

The human spirit is indomitable. Whether in Bangladesh or in Vietnam the invaders and occupiers only helped spark that spirit. In both the places the perpetrators of the crimes lacked the sense of history and miscalculated the moral power of the heroic people and dearly paid the prices for their misadventures. And those who sacrificed, suffered and underwent tribulations were finally crowned with historic success -- the timeless victories which will be the beacon of hopes for those who are still suffering the world over.

Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BLISS.

## PERSPECTIVES

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Bangladesh did the job -- Mukti Bahini softening the objectives through a war of attrition and Indian by its redoubtable commander, General Niazi -- a World War II veteran. Belying his latest bravado of "tank over my chest," a visibly panicked Niazi vied for a ceasefire and anything beyond that to extricate himself and his compatriots from the morass. Known as shera (the lion) he, at the end, proved himself a bagpipe general. But what's about the credit, if any, for the

India's was a professional and battle-hardened armed forces and was more than a match for Pakistan's Eastern Command. As expected its role in the war has been superb and its campaign went on

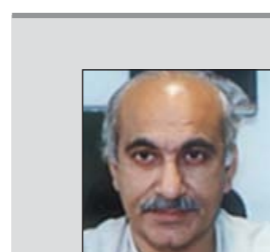
guerillas, according to Jagjit Singh Aurora, thoroughly "disorganised and isolated the Pakistan Army" before the Indian offensive was launched. In other words, they were the ones responsible for eventual success leading to victory -- a feat reminding us of the great patriotic wars of national liberation.

In an unequal war of the magnitude, witnessed during our liberation struggle where, to start with, a ragtag Mukti Bahini was facing up to a Goliath shorn of compassion; a

ment will be consigned to history once again let us see how a fourth rate power, as Vietnam was contemptuously referred to by President Nixon, routed the world's military giant on April 30, 1975 when the last US helicopter codenamed 'Lady 09' evacuated Ambassador Graham Martin from the roof top of US embassy building in Saigon. The mightiest of the west shattered on the hard glass of reality in Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam. Earlier the myth of French power exploded in the battle

agery of Linebaker II, which dropped 40,000 tonnes of bombs on Hanoi and 15,000 tonnes on Haiphong and targeted even schools and hospitals failed to achieve anything but giving "Nixon even more compelling reasons" to return to the negotiating table. The entire economy was 'twisted out of shape' and its social fabrics disintegrated. No less catastrophic were the moral and ethical dimensions of the war with its most telling effect lying in a 'Vietnam syndrome.'

# Tripartite solution



M.J. AKBAR

HERE follows a solution to the most compelling and complex challenge facing contemporary India.

Suggestion No. 1: If Govinda can become a Member of Parliament, why can't Sourav Ganguly? The Congress leaders of Bengal, defence minister Pranab Mukherjee and information and broadcasting minister Priya Ranjan Das Munshi have expressed the deepest concern over his fate and future. The Congress has such a shortage of candidates that they put up the hapless Nafisa Ali from Kolkata, although the chances of any voter below 60 recalling that she was born in the city were as remote as the possibility of George Bush winning an election from Fallujah. While Govinda needed a Congress wave in Mumbai to defeat Ram Naik, Sourav Ganguly could generate a pretty strong tide between Narkeldanga and Garia on his own.

After all, it is fear of alienating the young voter in Kolkata on the eve of the Bengal Assembly elections that made Pranab Babu (whose knowledge of cricket, shall we say, is not quite up to selector-level) and Priya Da (whose knowledge of football has made India a tenth-rank world power in the game) identify themselves with the former captain of the Indian cricket team. The logic is

simple: if Ganguly has become a vote-getter, let him get the votes for the party that needs them desperately in Bengal. Ganguly certainly isn't much of a run-getter anymore, and, on the field, more of a run-giver than a run-saver.

It is obvious that Sourav Ganguly has reached his first midlife crisis, and requires both our total sympathy and what help we can provide. Since a sportsman's working life is short, midlife also comes earlier. Ganguly is too famous to belong to

the new Kashmiri role-model Qazi Tauqeer and the svelte Bengali girl Ruprekha Banerjee. We are a proud democracy, and once vox populi has spoken there can be no further argument. The Voice of the People is the Voice of God.

This would take reality TV into a new dimension and assuage the ravenous hunger of TV channels for ratings. In one stroke all TV channels could become profitable. It would also appease the insatiable appetite of mobile phone compa-

polls would bring in far, far more revenue. Consider the ad rates for a ten-second spot just after the DJ (yes, sexily-dressed disc jockeys would run the show, not news anchors) announced, "And the winner is...! But before we tell you the name, ek chota sa break..."

Since selection is already all about frenzy, imagine the frenzy generated by election.

It would also be a well-funded election. All candidates would be backed by those industrial houses

enabling the government to fund the rural guaranteed employment scheme and keep the interest rates for pension funds at 9.5 percent. This would immediately stabilise the coalition government of Dr Manmohan Singh, and ensure that a Prime Minister as clean as him remained in office till 2009. I can see nothing but the pervasive glow of good news in my scheme.

Suggestion No. 3: Ramanathan Krishnan should be brought back as captain of the Indian Davis Cup

ment. I am very serious when I suggest that he must be honoured in some way for his talent and his contribution to modern Indian cricket. What he could not handle was decay, which is always slow, invisible to you but obvious to everyone else. The rewards of sport are commensurate with its demands and dangers. The worst wound to a sportsman's mind is the stab of fear. Once that lodges in your subconscious, it destroys you. Instead of dealing with the problem, Ganguly sought to prolong his sporting life with politics in the dressing room and the boardroom.

Indian cricket has been jinxed with its captains. Kapil Dev hung around not for the good of the team but to beat a world record in a tussle between age and utility. Azharuddin needed a disgraceful scam to be thrown out, and brought shame to a game he had done much to glorify. The Sachin Tendulkars who can leave the captaincy because it is hurting their contribution to the team are very rare. When Sachin's time comes to go, he will not wait to be pushed. He will not surrender the aura around his name for that one series more in which you tip over into an abyss. Even the most emotional of Ganguly's supporters argues that he should have been treated better because he was so good. The "was" is subconscious but accurate.

No player is bigger than a national team. We have a team today that can over the next two seasons be knitted into a winner of the World Cup in the West Indies. Or we can shred it into pieces, as the West Indies did to their once-phenomenal side.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

## BYLINE

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the shadows. He needs limelight like a temperamental plant needs sunlight, or he will wither. There is no better limelight for him than membership of Parliament. In fact, after getting him elected (a Congress MP could always resign in the national interest to make way for Sourav), the Congress could turn the limelight into a spotlight by making him minister for sports. He could then use all the power and influence of office to get his friend and mentor Jagmohan Dalmyia re-elected as chief of the Board of Control for Cricket in India. The other advantage is that neither Shane Bond nor Shoaib Akhtar will ever get elected to the Lok Sabha, so Sourav should shine in the House.

Suggestion No. 2: The selection of the Indian cricket team, the only team that matters to India, should be done by the same process that is used to select Indian pop idols like

whose goods they sponsor. We are talking multinational money here, my friends; not something siphoned off for asking questions in Parliament. If Indian politicians think that their elections have become expensive, they should watch what happens when Hutch takes on Airtel in the cricket stakes. I can see advertising agencies, direct marketing firms, opinion pollsters and public relations agencies sprouting up just to get their hands on the additional business. There will inevitably come a point when the BCCI charges a royalty of one rupee for every vote cast. If there is money to be made, you are not going to be able to keep the BCCI out of the loot, no matter whether it is headed by Jagmohan Dalmyia or Sharad Pawar. Business is business.

If things go well, and there is no reason why they should not, cricket-elections could add one per cent to India's economic growth, thereby

team, possibly along with Naresh Kumar and Akhtar Ali in the squad. The most persistent reason I have heard for retaining the "mahan kalakar," as an MP described him, in the team, is that Ganguly was so brilliant.

Indeed he was. There are very few joys in my life as great as watching Ganguly and Sachin Tendulkar in partnership at their best. It was magic. I think it was Dravid who described him as a god on the off-side. Trust me, those of us who have seen Ganguly at his best find it double embarrassing when Shane Bond turns him into a Jumping Jack, and every bowler who can pitch the ball short gets an extra nip when he sees Ganguly at the crease. Any player should hate the thought of television highlighting his follies on the news. It is not a pretty sight. It is also absolutely true that Ganguly was a great team leader once, and deserves every acknowledge-

ment. I am very serious when I suggest that he must be honoured in some way for his talent and his contribution to modern Indian cricket. What he could not handle was decay, which is always slow, invisible to you but obvious to everyone else. The rewards of sport are commensurate with its demands and dangers. The worst wound to a sportsman's mind is the stab of fear. Once that lodges in your subconscious, it destroys you. Instead of dealing with the problem, Ganguly sought to prolong his sporting life with politics in the dressing room and the boardroom.

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## OPINION

# Let's talk, let's unite

# Bangladeshi Biharis?

ABU IMRAN

MY attention was drawn to the news item (DS 26.10.2005) on the stranded Pakistanis wherein the hon'ble Pakistani High Commissioner had denied them their right to Pakistan nationality and termed them as 'Bangladeshi Biharis'.

With due apology I like to differ with him and strongly protest his remarks -- which never ever his predecessors did during the last over thirty years. Perhaps he is not the appropriate authority either to allow or disallow someone or many the right to Pakistan nationality. He is, if I remember correctly, new over here and may not be fully aware of the historical, political, social, psychological and emotional considerations which justify Pakistan nationality for the stranded Pakistanis, the so-called Biharis in Bangladesh.

Politically they have the right to go to Pakistan because on the basis of partition of the sub-continent into India and Pakistan in 1947, they migrated to both the wings of Pakistan -- West and East. For historical, political and religious reasons they sided with the Pakistani forces in 1971. And as true

Pakistanis, after the fall of Dhaka, they opted for Pakistan risking their lives and properties like the Bengalis who were then in Pakistan opted for Bangladesh. Rightly all the Bengalis who opted for Bangladesh were repatriated without question. And according to him (the High Commissioner) 'a good number' of them (the stranded Pakistanis) were repatriated to Pakistan in 1973/74 fulfilling the terms of agreement. He however did not explain what he meant by 'a good number.'

In fact, the number repatriated officially was a little over hundred thousand from among the then number of around 4-5 hundred thousand. Thus it would seem that only a small number were repatriated leaving the bulk, say around 2.5 to 3 hundred thousand, here to rot in the camps for decades. As to his observation that Pakistan had fulfilled its obligation by taking in the above-mentioned number of people, humbly I would say that it's not true. It is on record that, the then PM Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had said some thing like this -- "And if some of them (stranded Pakistanis) come (to Pakistan) say two, three, or four hundred thousand, then that would be better."

This version was published in the prestigious *Hindustan Standard* sometime in early part of 1972 or 1973, I am sorry to have forgone the exact date. But it was a mischief on the part of the then PM that he did not fulfil his own commitment of taking around four lac people and abruptly stopped the process of repatriation in 1974. And since then, in the later period, particularly during Mr Nawaz Sharif's time, a handful, perhaps in hundreds (not in thousands) were repatriated as an eye wash.

Socially and religiously the stranded Biharis have the right to go to Pakistan because they have further been divided by official repatriation of over a hundred thousand mentioned earlier. Now there are extreme hardship cases like separation of brothers and sisters, fathers and sons not to speak of other close relations. And this hardship is the making Pakistan Government since they allowed repatriation of some and left the bulk. Had they not have taken a single soul, that at least would not have made the extreme family division cases. Now since they have created the additional problem, it is their duty twice over that they should

soon solve the problem by taking the remaining around 2.5 lac people. Most people will bear with me that Pakistan was created for the purpose of accommodating Muslims of India in particular and those of the other parts in general.

Let that objective of Pakistan be fulfilled. Perhaps that was the reason that during Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan housed around 3.5 million Afghan Muslims in Pakistan and morally supported Afghans then in ousting the invaders. If they could accommodate those 35 lac then why can't they accommodate the Muslim stranded Pakistanis whose number is nearly 10 times less? There are 100 and one reasons for their repatriation and less than one against. And in view of the above if these Muslims are not repatriated, then the very concept of Pakistan comes to question. Let the hon'ble High Commissioner appreciate the problem and recommend to his government for repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis. This will be a good thing for him and the Muslim Ummah.

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