Apologise they Must

CHINTITO

This land has held open arms for every passer-by, even allowed them to set up home. But this land of giant rivers and trickling rivulets, of gigantic minds and brave sons, has been consistently intolerant to oppressors and dictators, foreign or home-bred.

ALTHOUGH eternally lacking forbearance for settlers as well as diplomatic willpower, the sub-continent always flaunted welcome arches for foreigners, making it appear overtly hospitable to looters, conquerors, traders and settlers; by choice or made so by force or by the guile of overenthusiastic opportunists from within.

Little wonder then that it was possible for an alien, a Central Asian Turk called Babar, to defeat the ruler of Delhi, and set up a magnificent empire that ruled the land of Indus Valley civilisation and of Vedic culture for three hundred years. So much so that Moguls are now known as Indians, not so easily vice versa that one.

The Greeks, the Central Asians, the Mongols, the Arabs, the Europeans and the British often virtually walked into the land, but today within the land once bracketed as India (albeit shredded by religion, language and culture) you need to stand in a queue and a have a visa to go from Dhaka to Kolkata or from Amritsar to Lahore; forget the trouble-free swivel around to say hello to Caesar at Athens, have a cup of grape juice with Nebuchadnezzar in Babylonia, have a game of archery with Genghis Khan at Ulan Bator, or speak your mind to B-liar at the White Hall.

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Born with two wings spread apart by a nemesis created by history that cut across its middle, Pakistan lost more than half its population by the excesses of its non-Bengali politicians, *razakars* and knee-wise generals. And so, within twenty-four years of independence from the occupying armed British business people, Pakistan bizarrely lodged a gruesome war it was destined to lose on the very wing that fed and nourished it for years. Why else should they call us *ummah* and let the respective non-people leaders exchange *chumma* along the cheeks?

While today visiting Pakistani leaders conveniently salute the martyrs of this land that verily their soldiers killed, it has evaded apologising and financially compensating (for moral compensation is impossible) for one of the most grisly crimes in the history of mankind. In fact, Pakistani leaders should not be allowed to set foot on the *Jatiya Smriti Soudha*, bathed in sacred blood of countless *shaheeds*, until they (Pakistanis) have asked for forgiveness for their sin.

The mother of the child lost in 1971 still wipes a tear. The widow hopelessly longs for the return of her loved one. The child of a *shaheed* expects every other living parent to at least feel, if not fight for the cause his father laid down his life.

The cruelty of the Pakistani junta aided by a predisposed civil service of the 1060s and 70s may be gauged to some extent by the treatment it is meting out to its supporters, languishing in sub-human conditions in the so-called Bihari camps in Bangladesh. A country that cannot shoulder its responsibility for its opted citizens for 35 long years has a lot to learn about Islamic values and brotherhood-- two of the many blames the mainly West Pakistanis levelled against the Bengali population in pre-1971. Let us pick up the folk tune and sing in chorus, 'Feel like laughing when we hear...' If that does not ring a bell, try "*shunle moder haashi paay...*"

The night is always dark. Tomorrow is significantly so.

On the night of 25 March 1971, the Pakistanis unleashed a reign of brutality unparallel in human history. Their heavily armed soldiers and militia fired indiscriminately on innocent civilian Bengali, (many in their sleep in slums, dormitories and barracks) in a bid to quell a civil movement led by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Futile has always been the exercise of the despot.

Day after tomorrow, the sun will rise as always. Day after tomorrow, more significantly so; it has seen the birth of a nation, a great nation. The sun did rise on 26 March 1971. Our enemy thereafter had no place to hide.

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Let only those set foot on the holy martyrs' memorial who believe that the then Pakistanis had severely wronged us Bengali.

Let only those salute the martyrs of Bangladesh who understand the grief of the mother.

Let only those lay floral wreaths on 26 March who share the anguish of the bride waiting for someone who shall never return.

Let only those call themselves Bangladeshis who value the distress of the child who tries to grasp the reality why his father never returned from the War of Liberation. ■