

Dhaka-Delhi contact rejuvenated

Menon's visit had some positive vibes

THE foreign secretary-level talks between India and Bangladesh, first in the last two years, that ended Tuesday in Dhaka have gone down well with keen watchers of the ups and downs in the multi-faceted relationship between the two neighbouring countries.

Seldom has a joint statement issued at the end of a visit of an Indian dignitary to Dhaka been marked by so little rhetoric and so much of a commonality of approach to face facts and deal with specifics in a well-ordered sequence based on an acknowledgement of the degrees of complications involved in handling long standing issues. That which could be approached easily has been taken up first followed by the rest.

Admittedly, whilst it may appear to be a practical way to go about addressing outstanding issues, the pressing nature of some problems over others can get a little diluted.

In terms of the joint statement, India is to give Bangladeshi goods duty-free access to its market by December 31 'in phases'. The joint working group on trade meets next month to sort out ways to reduce the number of goods on India's 'sensitive lists' protected from duty-free access. Bangladesh is drawing up its list of exportable items for the duty-free access.

Bangladesh and India have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to standardise their quality controls for certification, testing, measurement and quality assurance systems, which would help effectively remove non-tariff barriers for Bangladeshi goods.

How far these steps will go to reduce the huge trade deficit Bangladesh has with India, only time can tell.

Of significance is the understanding forged to share intelligence information on cross border crimes. This could lead to enhanced security cooperation between the two countries.

However, one would have expected a more emphatic statement on boundary demarcation, exchange of enclaves and adverse possessions than merely identifying these as 'priorities that require early resolution.' More than three decades have passed since Bangladesh and India signed the land boundary agreement, with the former actually ratifying it in her parliament, and yet its implementation is now regarded as being contingent upon consideration of 'ground realities.' All that it involves is demarcating 6.5km of borderland.

The discussions on greater land and rail links, coordinated development of land customs stations, establishment of 'border haats' and greater Indian investment into Bangladesh have sounded very forward-looking.

Nuclear plant

IAEA approval is a significant development

THE approval given to Bangladesh by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to set up nuclear reactors for power generation is an opportunity that the country should seize in order to cope with the ever-growing demand for electricity. It's also a recognition of the fact that Bangladesh is now considered a stable country where nuclear reactors can be built to meet its development needs through power generation.

The huge gap between demand and supply of power is a major obstacle on the way to accelerating the country's pace of economic development. Successive governments have failed to handle the issue efficiently and the situation has turned critical. So power generation at a cheaper cost using the nuclear technology could indeed be a big leap forward.

However, successful use of nuclear technology will depend on a number of factors. A team of experts has to be appointed to study the issue in detail. We have qualified professionals in this field who will get an opportunity to prove themselves once a nuclear reactor is put in place. Then we have sort of space constraint in an overpopulated country, which will make it doubly necessary to take the precautions and safety measures to prevent mishaps. Even in the United States and the former Soviet Union nuclear plant accidents took place with disastrous consequences. The memories of Chernobyl are still fresh in our mind. We have to upgrade our maintenance and supervision methods to internationally acceptable levels to be able to safely run nuclear plants. The environmentalists' concern must be duly addressed.

That said, the global quest for power at an affordable price has pushed the developed and developing countries to look for alternate sources of energy and, without question, nuclear technology has so far been found to be the most cost-effective one.

So, power generation through nuclear reactors is ideal for Bangladesh, but the whole exercise must be based on procurement of the most modern equipment and appointment of a highly reliable and competent team of engineers and technicians. The opportunity is a test for our preparedness to meet the challenges of the future world where peaceful use of nuclear technology will play a vital role.

Of hearts dark and mighty

Against the mighty hearts of the likes of the captain and the Pearls, the heart of darkness symbolized by the likes of Omar Saeed Sheikh and Khalid Sheikh Muhammad stand no chance. There is a lesson here: Never succumb to despair, and never be defined by fear but by hope.

HASAN ZILLUR RAHIM

THE recent release of the movie, "A Mighty Heart," based on the book of the same name by Mariane Pearl, widow of journalist Daniel Pearl who was slain in Karachi, Pakistan in 2002, has revived memories of this harrowing event and its implications in a post-9/11 world that seems to be spinning out of control.

Pearl, who was the Mumbai-based India correspondent of The Wall Street Journal, arrived in Karachi with his five-month pregnant wife in January 2002, to pursue the investigation of "shoe bomber" Richard Reid and his possible al-Qaida links in Pakistan.

Trusting, curious, and driven by a passion for truth, Pearl agreed to meet a mysterious, elusive imam

named Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani whose followers, it was believed, included Reid. A man named Muhammad Bashir arranged the meeting.

It was a trap, and on January 23, 2002, Daniel Pearl walked straight into it.

A frantic search begins when Mariane suspects that her husband has been kidnapped. Pakistan's intelligence agency (inter-services intelligence, the ISI), the US consulate in Karachi, and the FBI pool their resources to rescue Pearl.

The movie is faithful to these well-known facts but what is remarkable is the skill with which director Michael Winterbottom conveys the facts. Although we know at the outset what happens to Pearl, the movie plays like a

Reform Public Service Commission

The examination system followed by IBA of Dhaka University, and internationally reputed exams like GRE, Gmet, Sat etc., may be considered in this regard. A set of transparent guidelines, consisting of the examination rules and the recruitment process, should be prepared and made available to the public. It should ensure a transparent and effective guideline/manual for the viva-voce. The examination system should ensure evaluation of all exams and tests by relevant, skilled and credible examiners.

MD. REZAUL KARIM

THE Bangladesh Public Service Commission (PSC) is one of the most vital constitutional bodies in Bangladesh. It has a very substantial role in promoting excellence in public administration and governance, because it selects competent persons for the public services of the republic.

A professional, even-handed and efficient public administration greatly depends on the integrity, effectiveness and credibility of the PSC. However, partisan appointment of chairman/members, leakage of question papers over the years, and bribe taking by a few members and officials have contributed to a grave erosion of credibility of the PSC. Transparency International Bangladesh's (TIB) study (March) also reveals that only 1.85% BCS examinees have full trust in the PSC.

The TIB study shows that the effectiveness and independence of the PSC fundamentally depend on two factors: the willingness of the government, and the structural and institutional strength of the PSC.

But during the last 35 years, all successive governments have used the PSC as an institute for partisan recruitment, and also kept it structurally and institutionally dysfunctional. Recently, six members resigned from the PSC.

One of them is absconding, facing allegations of abuse of power. Like the previous governments, the present government

has also appointed a new chairman and two new members in the PSC without maintaining transparency.

Removal of the chairman, members and corrupt officials from constitutional bodies like the PSC is not a sustainable remedy. Without bringing reforms in the structural (i.e., legal and official mandates/documents) and institutional areas of the PSC, the recruitment policies of the government, and the examination system, the PSC can never be made free from corruption. But the government has still not touched these fundamental areas of reforms in the PSC. However, the following reform measures may be undertaken.

Transparent appointment

The PSC should be composed of chairperson/member(s) with impeccable professional excellence, knowledge and experience of public administration, political neutrality, moral courage, personality and commitment, and undisputed integrity and credibility. Necessary legal provisions should be made in this regard before appointment of the rest of the members in PSC.

Constitutional search committee

A search committee may be formed for appointment of persons in all constitutional bodies, including PSC, of the republic without controversy. The committee may be comprised of 5-7 members, like the prime minister, chief justice, leader of the opposition in the Parliament, chairman of the Anti-

Corruption Commission (ACC), an eminent retired civil servant, and a non-partisan and professionally acclaimed educationist/civil society/media person with similar credibility. It should avoid making a partisan search committee again. The experience of Nepal, Sri Lanka and South Africa may be used here.

Independence and accountability

The PSC must be granted full independence, befitting the challenge facing it. The Commission must have internal self-regulatory and transparency mechanisms in place, and it must report to the Parliament through the Standing Committee on Public Service.

Specific, effective, and transparent accountability measures should be ensured for everyone in the PSC. Statements of income, expenditure and assets of the chairman, all its members and staff, and their immediate family members, must be declared, and regularly updated through website.

Investigation of PSC's corruption

The ACC may be called upon to investigate all sorts of irregularities and corruptions at all levels, including the former and present chairman, members, officers and employees, and their dependents. The investigation should include all recruitments, especially from the 20-27th BCS exams, since 1991.

Status/rank

The status/rank of PSC chairman should be made equivalent to a minister, and members should be equivalent to the judges of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. The secretary of PSC should be made equivalent to the secretary of the government.

Code of ethics

It should introduce an Integrity Statement for PSC. The empirical experience from South Africa and developed nations may be considered in this regard.

Anti-corruption hotline

A hotline (phone number or mail box) may be introduced in the office of the ACC to receive all sorts of complaints related to irregularities and corruption in the PSC. The Special Reform Committee on PSC and ACC may jointly explore the specific structure and working procedure of this hotline.

Initiatives should be taken to assess the assets and liabilities of all the staff, and their dependents, in the PSC through the National Board of Revenue, and to regularly update the same.

Ombudsman

An independent and effective Ombudsman is necessary for settling the disputes, dissatisfactions and allegations.

Citizen's committee on PSC

A committee of concerned citizens, composed of persons with proven integrity, efficiency and commitment, may be constituted to keep watch on the activities and performance of the PSC, and to suggest measures to make it efficient and honest.

Citizen's charter

As per recommendation of the Public Administration Reform Commission (2000), a citizen's charter may be introduced for PSC. This initiative will certainly contribute in restoring the credibil-

ity of the PSC.

Review examination system

An examination and recruitment reform committee may be formed immediately to modernise the examination and recruitment system for meeting the challenges for the civil service of the 21st century. The existing generalised exam system should be abolished, and cadre-specific examination should be introduced to ensure efficiency and professionalism in service.

Credible examination system

Measures should be taken to ensure equitable, credible, and merit-based recruitment. There must be complete abolition of partisan, political, or any other influence in the recruitment, and completion of exams within a very short time.

The examination system followed by IBA of Dhaka University, and internationally reputed exams like GRE, Gmet, Sat etc., may be considered in this regard. A set of transparent guidelines, consisting of the examination rules and the recruitment process, should be prepared and made available to the public.

It should ensure a transparent and effective guideline/manual for the viva-voce. The examination system should ensure evaluation of all exams and tests by relevant, skilled and credible examiners.

Quota system

The existing quota system for freedom fighters and districts should be reviewed to conform to new realities. At least 75% of places should be on purely merit basis, while the remaining may be distributed for action on the basis of gender, and ethnic and religious identity.

Access to information

The result sheets of all examinees

(both successful and unsuccessful) must be published on the website. The existing restrictions against challenging the result of examinations should be abolished.

Institutional reforms

- The secretariat should be rearranged, with competent persons in the appropriate positions. A human resource unit should be established at PSC, with special emphasis on training and capacity building of the staff. Necessary legal provisions should be made to ensure non-partisan appointments, postings, rewards and punishments in PSC.
- The staff should be recruited through an independent and credible institution, like IBA of Dhaka University. Recruitments, postings and incentives -- both negative and positive -- of the PSC staff should be purely on the basis of competence and integrity. The corrupt officials should be put on trial.
- A website should be set up, containing all the information that the citizens should have, in order to restore the Commission's credibility and public trust. Initiative should also be taken to modernize the exiting office management.
- There should be a complaint box to receive all complaints and suggestions from its service recipients. All complaints and suggestions should be duly addressed, and the results made public.

A special reform committee on PSC may be formed to accomplish the above recommendations, with special emphasis on neutrality, independence and effectiveness of the PSC, rather than replacement of its members only.

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Bhadrolok: Please revisit.

Bangali Hindu nationalism, not Bangali nationalism, was clearly promoted in Bangla literature. And this Hindu nationalism ultimately led to the politics of communalism. The result was the ostracizing of the Muslim population of Bengal. The literature and politics of this period created a distinct, and inferior, social space for Muslims. And this is what the bhadroloks of "Bangali renaissance" did. Yes sir, this is it.

SALEQUE KHAN

ABDUL Quader, the writer of "The bhadrolok foreign affairs adviser of Bangladesh" published on June 21, is my primary source of whom the foreign affairs adviser of Bangladesh, Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, has identified as *bhadrolok* and transposed it to the present Bangladesh time-frame.

Quader says: "The adviser spoke of the role of so-called *bhadrolok* (gentleman) in Bengali renaissance." And here I come in, both for Quader and Chowdhury. When did Bangali renaissance take place? Let us look at the mise-en-scène of the nineteenth-twentieth century Bengal.

The *bhadroloks* were important role-players, by any judgment I suppose, in bringing "a glorious dawn" in the politics and literature of the nineteenth and twentieth century Bengal. June 23 is a significant day to remember in terms of historical perspective, if not emotional (with due respect to Faruque Hasan, writer of *The*

Battle of Palashi published on June 24).

Bengal lost its freedom at Palashi -- the lost battle is often regarded as the "tragedy of Palashi." But the tragedy was not perceived as tragedy by all the Bangali historians and writers of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Raj, many Bangali Hindu leaders and intellectuals welcomed the British as allies in the struggle against Muslim domination. That is probably why Bangali Hindu writers, some of whom were considered torch bearers of "renaissance," misrepresented the last Muslim ruler of Bengal.

In the literature of the period, the last Muslim ruler of Bengal, Nawab Siraj-ud-Daula, was portrayed as a villain. In his epic poem, "*Palashir Juddha*" (The Battle of Palashi), the Hindu Bangali poet Nabin Chandra Sen portrayed Siraj-ud-Daula as a vicious, cowardly, debauched young man torn by fear and lust, who spent most of his time in a

harem of dancing girls.

Joya Chatterji finds that Sen's characterization of Siraj-ud-Daula "was responsible, perhaps more than any other work, for immortalizing the image of Siraj-ud-Daula as a debauched lecher, filled with fear and doubt on the eve of the famous battle, but unable to stir himself out of his drunken lethargy to face Robert Clive's challenge." Sen's poem is a clear example of how history can be slanted for political reasons.

Much later, in 1932 B.C., Chatterjee, in his *Betrayal of Britain and Bengal*, described Palashi as the moment when Bengal was liberated from the tyranny of the Muslims, ushering "in a new age of 'the out-flowering (sic) of the Bengali Hindu genius and culture' (in Chatterji 1994: 183)." Thus both Bangali Hindu historians and literary writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century played a crucial role in the creation and popularization of communal stereotypes by "depicting 'Muslim rule' as 'tyrannical,'

and Muslim rulers as cruel, violent, fanatical and sexually uncensored (in Chatterji 1994: 160)." Prominent Bangali historian, Sir Jadunath Sarkar, went even further. He altogether denied Muslims a place in the history of modern Bengal. The Muslims brought Bengal nothing but barbarism and tyranny during "their period (1200-1757)." Sarkar narrated the battle of Palashi and its aftermath as: "a glorious dawn, the like of which the history of the world has not seen elsewhere. On 23rd June, 1757, the middle age of India ended, and her modern age began [...]. In the space of less than one generation, in the twenty years from Plassey [old spelling] to Warren Hastings ... the land began to recover from the blight of medieval theocratic rule [...]. The dry bones of a stationary oriental society began to stir, at first faintly, under the wand of a heaven-sent magician [Robert Clive] (in Chatterji 1994: 183-184)." Generally, distortion and misrepresentation of the Muslim rule were common among the Bangali Hindu *bhadrolok*, even among those who were exposed to English/European education and later played, and claimed, the role of torch-bearers of the Bangali Renaissance.

With these prejudices firmly in

place, the *bhadroloks* believed Muslims had no place in modern culture, and took credit for the creation of modern Bengal. Chatterji puts forward this viewpoint of the Bangali Hindu *bhadrolok*: "They [Hindus] had made Bengal what it was -- albeit with the help of 'light' 'borrowed' from the British -- the center of India's civilization. By rights, therefore, Bengal belongs to them. The Renaissance, from this viewpoint, became a symbol not only of a culture which was *bhadralok* (also spelled *bhadrolok*), but also of a Hindu Bengal from which Muslims were excluded (in Chatterji 1994: 187)." The exclusions and misrepresentations of the Muslims continued to play a significant role, right up to Indian independence and the partition of Bengal in 1947. The line between "them" and "us," between Hindus and Muslims, was drawn more clearly and more visibly day-by-day by politicians in power and, of course, by the *bhadroloks*.

The writings of the "Hindu Renaissance" of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while reflecting the violence and promoting communalism among Hindus and Muslims, focused on the search for a glorious national/Hindu past, with emphasis not only on Hindu communal unity but also on asserting Hindu

superiority, e.g. Rabindranath Tagore's novel *Gora* (1910). *Gora* the central character, is Tagore's radical Hindu nationalist. Chatterji explains that Gora's "impassioned defence of orthodoxy and traditional values reflected the spirit of militant Hindu nationalism: it also mirrored the mood of *bhadralok* Bengal (in Chatterji 1994: 158)." The new histories of the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth century were aimed primarily at implanting a spirit of national pride among middle-class Hindu Bangalis. In 1926, Saratchandra Chattopadhyay (1876-1938), author of *Pather Dabi*, set out in his essay, Bartaman Hindu-Mussalman Samasya (the Hindu-Muslim Problem of the Present Time), the case for Hindu cultural superiority.

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Saleque Khan is a former coordinator of Student Affairs, New York University.

being beheaded by his captors weeks earlier, after he is coerced into confessing his "Jewishness."

Angelina Jolie is brilliant as Mariane Pearl, at once restrained and explosive. When informed that her husband has been murdered, Jolie retreats to her room in a trance and breaks out into a wail that has to be among the most heartrending in movie history.

Also impressive is an army-trained officer called "Captain," (played by Irfan Khan) head of Pakistan's counter-terrorism unit. The captain vows to Marianne that: "I will bring your Danny home," and later, that he will bring Pearl's killers to justice "even if it is going to take a lifetime, my lifetime." The Muslim captain is soft-spoken, but there is no mistaking the steel beneath the velvet.

It was the captain who found that Bashir, who lured Daniel into the fatal trap, was in reality Omar Saeed Sheikh, the London School of Economics dropout arrested in 1994 in New Delhi for kidnapping American and British tourists. The Indian government, in exchange

for the hostages of an Indian airliner hijacked to Afghanistan in December 1999, released him.

A Pakistani court, in July 2002, sentenced Omar Saeed Sheikh to death for killing Pearl, but with several appeals pending, he remains in jail. In the tangled world of terror, however, the truth behind the killing of Daniel Pearl remains as elusive as ever.

On March 15, 2007, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks who was captured in Rawalpindi in March 2003, told a U.S. military tribunal that he personally beheaded Daniel Pearl. "I decapitated with my blessed right hand the head of the American Jew, Daniel Pearl, in the city of Karachi, Pakistan. For those who would like to confirm, there are pictures of me on the Internet, showing me holding his head."

Mohammed claimed that he was tortured while in CIA custody, but told the judge at his hearing that he was speaking freely and was telling the truth. How will Mohammed's confession affect

the fate of Omar Saeed Sheikh? No one seems to know, and that is a source of anger and frustration for Mariane and all those who wish to see justice done.

Mariane, whose mother is Cuban and father Dutch, gave birth to Daniel's posthumous son, Adam D. Pearl, on May 26, 2002 in Paris. (We learn from the book that, as she is getting ready to give birth to Adam, she is wearing a long white shirt she and Danny had bought in Dhaka, Bangladesh) Through Adam, she hopes to continue the legacy of her husband.

What is this legacy? As Mariane explains, it is to remain true to your purpose in life and to never let hate consume you. It is to reject a Manichean worldview where subjective versions of good vs. evil are locked in an eternal battle, a world without hope, and a world where violence is the only solution.

"Part of my 'revenge' (against the fanatics) was that my purpose wouldn't change -- not how I live, the work that I do, or my approach to the world," she recently said in Time

magazine. In response to: "Has your view of Islam changed?" Mariane replied: "No, it hasn't changed at all. I grew up with Muslim people, so I was very acquainted with Islam. So it is not like the people who killed Danny thought me what Islam was about. They are hijackers of their own faith."

And when asked: "You have a great love for the Pakistani people. Has that love changed?" Mariane said: "Not at all ... For me the nationality and the religion is really a secondary matter. For me, it is all a matter of human behaviour ... The people who I truly love in Pakistan are the most noble, powerful and deep people that I have ever met in my life. At times like that you encounter the worst human behaviour possible, so you are also going to be very sensitive to the best human behaviour possible."

In the context of the war on terror waged by the U.S. government since 9/11, in which the certitude of zealots and nihilists is matched by the certitude of the movers and shakers in Washington, Mariane Pearl is a

beacon.

While she is more eager than anyone to see the killers of her husband, and the killers of innocent people anywhere, brought to justice, she has achieved the ultimate victory against the extremists by remaining focused on her goal, and her husband's, of bridging races, religions and cultures through compassion and understanding.

Like her husband Daniel, Mariane gives substance to Hemingway's observation in *The Old Man and the Sea*: "A man can be destroyed but not defeated."

Against the mighty hearts of the likes of the captain and the Pearls, the heart of darkness symbolized by the likes of Omar Saeed Sheikh and Khalid Sheikh Muhammad stand no chance. There is a lesson here: Never succumb to despair, and never be defined by fear but by hope.

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