

Textbook Board rewrites history of Bangladesh

Travesty of truth to end

THE government decision to give Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman his rightful place in the nation's history has been duly reflected in the National Curriculum and Textbook Board's initiative to incorporate the necessary changes in the textbook. In the new editions of books for classes 1 to 5 and 6 to 10 for the year 2008, due recognition will be given to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the Father of the Nation and the contribution of other national leaders in the liberation war in 1971. Due place will be given to former president Ziaur Rahman for proclamation of independence on behalf of Bangabandhu at the outset of the liberation war. The steps will no doubt lend authenticity to the history of Bangladesh, which has been distorted many times over in the past.

No nation can earn the respect of other nations if its history continues to remain in a haze of deception. Bengalees had earned the respect and support of the entire world when they rose as one against the oppressive rule of the West Pakistani military junta. The liberation war in 1971 culminated in the creation of Bangladesh, the first ever independent nation-state of the Bengali speaking people in the world. But its euphoria was cut short when in 1975 Bangabandhu was brutally assassinated. It was since then that attempts were made to obliterate his role and that of other national leaders in the creation of Bangladesh and rewrite history from a partisan point of view. The name of late Ziaur Rahman, who made signal contribution to the liberation war in his own right, was used in the game of placing him at a higher level than that of Bangabandhu. In the sordid affair it was the truth that became the casualty.

The historical decision taken by an interim, non-elected government concerning the rightful place of Bangabandhu in the nation's history has amply exposed the blatant partisanship and moral and intellectual bankruptcy of the politicians who endeavoured to reap benefits from a divided nation. We feel that when in last March chief of army staff Gen. Moeen U Ahmed said that Bangabandhu's rightful place could not be established in 36 years, he in fact spoke for the majority of the people and brought the issue on to the centre stage of discourse. We commend him for it.

The people also need to be made aware of the roles played by the Razakar, Al-Badar and Al-Shams who collaborated with the occupation forces to deny the Bengalees their coveted dream -- Bangladesh.

We once again welcome the decision to rewrite the textbooks, which should end the travesty of our national history.

Depositors being questioned?

Excessive caution can be counterproductive

FINANCE Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam has hit the nail on the head. He drew the attention of the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) to their clients being grilled about sources of money they came to deposit with them. In case where the amount is Tk one lac or above, the intending depositor would be questioned by an NCB for an hour or so about the source of his/her money. Naturally, the person feels harassed and shrivels. And as the word gets around genuine depositors could have second thoughts and might shy away from having anything to do with banks. Deposits are the bank's raison d'être.

It is therefore quite understandable why the finance adviser has reprimanded the NCBs, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that an ambience of stifling over caution exists in the financial sector as a whole. Bangladesh Bank has issued circulars from time to time to the banks alerting them to suspicious financial dealings etc. In a situation like this two things can happen: either the officials feel cramped in their style or they turn out to be overzealous misapplying the rules. All this is hindering smooth functioning of the financial sector.

The atmosphere of apprehension and fear is leading to a dwindling of public confidence in the banking sector, perhaps, in no less a degree than had been the case with banks having promoted default culture earlier on and weakened themselves from inside out.

As it is, the customer service in the NCBs as compared with that of the private banks has drawn considerable flak for their laid back attitude. And now comes this grilling as an insult to injury.

It is against the norms of corporate culture to deal with the customers like some suspicious offenders. The finance adviser, the central bank and the commercial banks must get their act together to make the banking system more customer-friendly.

Growing US-India relationship



HARUN UR RASHID

BOTTOM LINE

The question is -- is this strategy working? China and Pakistan are closely watching with some concern the possible impact of the growing strategic relationship between the US and India on the Asia-Pacific region. India wants its long-term partnership with the US to be based on the vision for democracy and freedom in all countries, and many strategists suggest that democratic countries such as US-Australia-Japan-India are likely to constitute a kind of security (not military) alliance to confront North Asia's instability and China's supremacy in the Asia-Pacific region.

strength." Obviously, Nehru thought that China and Pakistan might pose threat to its security.

In 1962, during the brief war between India and China, India reportedly sought help for 43 B-25 bombers and a range of weapons from the US. India's ambassador to the US, Sir Girja Shankar Bajpal, even indicated that India would always be with America in defending the "free world" against Soviet communism. Eventually, India did not get the bombers. It was India's press, not the government, that was anti-American.

Many think that by transforming its relationship to a higher gear and establishing a global partnership with the US means that India has significantly shifted its foreign policy, aligning it with the US. Some say India is not beholden anymore to non-alignment, as it had lost its relevance at the end of the Cold War, although it keeps its verbal commitment towards it.

The picture of global power has changed, and India has been following Lord Palmerston's famous dictum about nations having permanent national interests, not permanent friends or eternal enemies.

Nehru, in the early years of India's independence, suggested that India should "align with the United States somewhat, and build up its economic and military

revolution of the 21st century without America's cooperation.

India understands that it needs US nuclear technology, not only for its defence but also for its energy. India has to compete with China in economic growth. This, in turn, calls for American technology and investment, and access to the US market for its goods.

The nuclear deal between the two countries is important, although some difficulties have arisen in relation to India's using US nuclear fuel and technology for military purposes. Only a few days ago the president and the prime minister reportedly discussed at length about resolving the issue.

On defence side, India reckons that it is America that can help it to defend itself. Furthermore, no other power can exert pressure on potential "enemies" who are likely to destabilize the country from within and outside.

Terrorism highlights a convergence of interests in confronting the same menace, and both conveniently ignore the reasons for being subjected to terrorism. Both the leaders consider the symptoms as the disease.

The Indian Ocean has been increasingly militarized. India,

China, Myanmar, Malaysia and Pakistan are engaged in bolstering their navies to oversee the lanes of the Indian Ocean. China has extended its influence into the Indian Ocean through Myanmar's Coco Islands, where it has reportedly established a naval base.

India has been establishing military infrastructure projects that are intended for power projection on its off-shore islands. Indian navy patrols regularly visit distant shores of the Indian Ocean, that reaches out from South Africa to the Straits of Malacca.

In this context, the US navy may extend its cooperation with India to secure the fuel-rich Middle East that holds the key to global energy. On the other hand, the US needs India for strategic and economic reasons.

India has a growing middle class (about 300 million and increasing every year), and they have disposable incomes to buy sophisticated consumer goods. American goods can satisfy them. It is a big market for American multi-nationals. There is a huge possibility for cooperation in joint investment, joint enterprise, and joint exploitation of natural resources.

At the end of the Cold War, the US rekindled its hope of reinventing the world to promote good governance, democracy, human rights, and free market. The US considers India's vibrant democracy will help it to achieve this goal.

The US considers that India is the only country in Asia that is likely to be able to contain China's increasing diplomatic, military and economic influence in the region. China has already won the hearts and minds of ASEAN, and extends its naval power through Myanmar.

Many suggest that the current political tension in Myanmar appears to be a proxy war between China and India. If Aung San Suu Kyi becomes the leader, India's influence, along with Japan's, will increase in Myanmar at the expense of China's. This is the reality, and that is why Myanmar's military leaders have been very close to China.

Another strategic interest is Afghanistan, for both the US and India. India's strategy is that Afghanistan should not only be free from Taliban but it should also come out from Pakistan's grip. India has been partially successful in having President Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan, who had gone to school in Simla and referred to India as his second home.

Furthermore, Musharraf and Karzai blame each other for the upsurge of Taliban fighters in Afghanistan. The Bush administration's priorities are -- combating terrorism, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional stability, and the challenge posed by China. The list reflects the extent to which geography

shapes politics and alliances. To the Bush administration, India's size, population, skills, resources, and potential can make a major contribution as a "global partner" with the US.

India hopes that America can encourage President Musharraf to come to terms with India's geography, and advise him that Pakistan's security lies in cooperation, not confrontation, with India. The ultimate power relation between US and India, many suggest, depends on how far and to what extent the US is able to restrain and counsel Pakistan not to destabilise India and, in turn, the region.

One fact to be noted is that India is a regional power, and claims not to be a client state. Therefore, India sees no anomaly in vigorously pursuing strategic cooperation with the US, while buying Russian arms and mending fences with China.

The question is -- is this strategy working? China and Pakistan are closely watching with some concern the possible impact of the growing strategic relationship between the US and India on the Asia-Pacific region.

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Can Pakistan embrace moderation?



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

Pakistan's Islam, like all South Asian Islam, is marked by Sufi influences and diversity. It's eminently amenable to moderation, modernism, and the idea that different religions and non-religious traditions can coexist and enrich one another. Pakistani Islam's wahabi reinterpretation is recent and artificial, and must be combated -- even as enlightened rationalism is promoted. India, too, has a vital interest in this outcome. Ultimately, its own destiny is bound up with that of Pakistan's.

tion." However, he's on shaky ground. He allowed Lal Masjid to be turned into a fundamentalist fortress. Had he acted resolutely earlier, especially after Jamia Hafza students' rampage in January, he could have averted Operation Silence, which killed nearly 100 people.

But he gave the militants a free hand. It was only when they arrested "immoral" foreign nationals, and China protested, that Gen Musharraf stopped appealing them.

The fate of his pledge to eradicate extremism, and of his political plans, will be determined mainly by the Supreme Court's impending verdict on Justice Chaudhry's petition, and by Pakistani political parties' success in pressing for holding parliamentary elections before the presidential elections. External pressure will also play a role.

Gen Musharraf will find it hard to browbeat Pakistan's judiciary, which stands emboldened by massive support for Justice Chaudhry, on the election issue.

The major powers, including the United States, are also unlikely to accept this easily -- absent a new,

special jehadi threat to them.

Meanwhile, there's been political regrouping, with the formation in London of the All-Party Democratic Movement alliance between the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and the religious parties' MMA.

Although Ms Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party kept out of it, APDM's formation will make it difficult for her to cut a deal: return to Pakistan and contest elections -- in exchange for supporting Gen Musharraf's presidency bid.

It seems increasingly likely that the general will have to allow both Mr Sharif and Ms Bhutto to contest elections. The elections would have to be credibly free and fair in order to produce a legitimate government.

The only way Gen Musharraf can postpone elections is by precipitating a fresh crisis and declaring a state of emergency. This would only aggravate his crisis of legitimacy, and strengthen jehadi militancy, with grave consequences.

It will also greatly erode his USP (unique selling proposition) for the West -- namely, he is its best ally against al-Qaeda/Taliban.

Such a devious manoeuvre will probably prolong the stagnation in, and complicate, the peace process with India. And it will seriously weaken Gen Musharraf's attempt to redefine Pakistan's political debate along "extremism vs moderation" lines.

There is an alternative. Gen Musharraf can grasp the nettle by boldly opening up the political process and setting Pakistan on the road to democratisation, while decisively severing the quarter-century-old link between the state and jehadi extremism consolidated under Gen Zia-ul Haq.

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More, it means beginning the dismantlement of the institutional structures of the state-jehadi nexus, including the Inter-Services Intelligence agency.

Pakistan's next, elected, government will have to grapple with the three major contradictions that have marked the country's evolution.

So Gen Musharraf will have to launch something akin to Pope John Paul II's Second Vatican Council of the 1960s -- a quiet

revolution in the Catholic Church to make it relevant to the contemporary reality of a diverse world divided along ideological lines, which judges faith not just by a theological, but by a social, yardstick.

This is a tall order. Gen Musharraf may never rise to it. But we must hope the intelligentsia, civil society, and enlightened politicians will take up the task.

India has a big stake in a Pakistan that pursues political and religious moderation, is strongly pluralist and inclusive, and is firmly committed to subordinating its military to civilian control.

Contrary to what India's Right-wing "security experts" never tire of saying, Pakistan is not destined to be a military dictatorship, nor a wahabi-salafist society.

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Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

Sheikh Hasina's arrest

They may be buoyed up and feel secure within your mutual covenant, but our party has been around for nearly sixty years and people have long memories. As you approach the border line of McCarthyism, and the Salem Witch Hunts of the 17th Century, where an accusation of being a communist or a witch meant immediate indictment (no different from any individual bringing an extortion charge, with usually the flimsiest evidence, against another), your arrest of Sheikh Hasina may be your biggest mistake yet (and these appear to be mounting with each day).

RASHID SUHRAWARDY

In January 1972 Bangladesh stood on the brink of a singular opportunity, rarely, if ever, offered to any nation. We had suffered a holocaust of unabashed opprobrious cruelty and carnage at the hands of a vicious and contemptible Pakistan army during the previous nine months.

But through a combination of sheer courage and obdurate obstinacy we confronted their overbearing military might and at a cost of three million lives, that brought nothing but shame to Yahya Khan, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and their killing machine, we won our independence.

Within a short period of time we had restored parliamentary democracy, one of the axioms of the Awami League constitution, to our political structure. At the same time we produced one of the finest Constitutions ever drafted. The world seemed to be our oyster. The country was replete with self-belief and optimism. Within two years all our earlier hopes and aspirations were dashed on an anvil of corruption, mismanagement and incompetence.

Apart from the obvious miscreants and felons, who were undeniable targets of this new government, the whole nation rose, as it did in 1971, in unconditional support of the new regime. We eagerly anticipated, as we had done in 1972, a rectification of the evils and injustices of the past few years.

The nation was once again becoming polarized as paramilitary forces began to dominate. In an effort to unite the country Sheikh Mujib conceived the (at least, what

regard it to be) dysfunctional and autocratic system of Baksal. A year later he and most of his family were brutally murdered, a stain that will never be expunged from the fabric of this nation.

The significant point of all this is that we had a unique opportunity to bring cohesion, fairness and stability to the country. We failed, and have suffered the consequences for the next thirty-five years. Six months ago, through a series of well-organized maneuvers, we overthrew the most inept caretaker government in our history and replaced it with, what at first appeared to be, an interim government of sobriety and integrity.

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Moreover, your honeymoon period with the people is quickly coming to an end. The rest of the world, at first keen to support your program provided you followed a reasonable road map and operated within the legal parameters of even emergency conditions, is witnessing a slow and cynical disintegration within your political fabric.

It saw you make complete fools of yourselves over Sheikh Hasina's return to Dhaka some two and a half months ago. It is watching you prosecute and (in absentia) hand out draconian sentences to individuals for possessing a few bottles and cans of contraband liquor. These people should be fined for their infraction of the law, not imprisoned!

For heaven's sake, Bangladesh is not a "dry" country, and these ridiculous sentences are nothing more than a cynical attempt to hold certain individuals until fresh charges of a far more serious and acceptable nature are brought against them. In the meantime, the rest of the world wonders what kind of justice any individual can obtain if the courts are going to behave in this manner (so much for the separation of the judiciary from the executive).

In an effort to isolate the two ladies from the political scene you have managed to seduce, and negotiate with, certain leading political players. I really don't care, nor do I know a great deal of the BNP renegades, but "the rats leaving the sinking ship" are nothing more than cynical politicizing.

Moreover, her arrest will have the effect of bringing even the most ambitious and recalcitrant party leaders to heel, as her supporters all

over the world observe the modus operandi of the dissident Awami League leaders (please note Razzak's retraction of his earlier criticism of Zillur Rahman's position as acting president of the party, and Tofael's conciliatory television interview).

However, I say to Dr Fakhrudin, to my good friend Mainul Hosseini, and to all the members of this interim government, the ball is now very much in your court. If you want to promote yourselves as the purveyors of justice and rectitude you had better deal with this case with the gossamer touch of complete scrupulousness.

You step one inch out of line and you will be no different from all the other autocratic regimes which have blighted our lives over the past seven decades and which, full of early good intentions, turned out to