

Jamaat denies its anti-liberation role War criminals must be punished

We reject with unreserved repugnance the claim of Jamaat's secretary general Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid that Jamaat-e-Islami never worked against our independence struggle and there is no such thing as war criminals in the country. He said this before media displaying veritable arrogance and ire when asked about the role of Jamaat-e-Islami during the nine-month Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. To our utter shock and indignation, Mujahid not only denied any wrong-doing by his party but was defiant enough to throw a challenge to the newsmen to dig into the history and find for themselves the role of Jamaat.

We are outraged by the attempts to mock at the sacrifices of millions and the masses who fought for our Liberation War by those who played a terrorizing part in it to perpetuate the rule of the Pakistani military junta. We consider this unashamed utterance as impertinence of the most appalling kind that ought to be denounced and countered by everyone in society.

The history of the dark and destructive role of Jamaat-e-Islami before and during the Liberation War is too well-recorded at home and abroad in various forms to allow seepage of confusion or misunderstanding of any kind. The members of this party had taken sides with the Pakistani occupation forces and carried out atrocities of horrendous nature on the freedom-loving people of Bangladesh. They had created para-military forces like al-Badar and al-Shams under the direct control of the Pakistani military commanders and helped them in picking up the freedom fighters from their hideouts. Finally, only days before the ultimate victory on December 16 they struck with the stealth of vipers in the darkness of nights to eliminate the best of our brains. The nation mourns this sad event on December 14 every year. We therefore wonder, how dark a man's heart can be to deny such painful events?

It is ironical indeed that when most Pakistani people today express regret and sorrow, in privacy at least, at the rape and murders committed by the occupation forces in 1971, their Bengali quislings remain unremorseful and unapologetic till date. Today they deny their dark role in the Liberation War, tomorrow they will dare to deny the marvelous feat of the freedom fighters and then the very existence of Bangladesh.

When Jamaat had won some seats in last two general elections and came to parliament we respected voters' choice and tried to convince ourselves that they have come to terms with reality and would now apologise before the nation for their nefarious role in '71. But, today, with the infuriating utterance, Mujahid has made it obvious that they would continue to disrespect and deny our Liberation War and as such our independence.

We once again express our deeply-felt umbrage at the blatant comments of Mujahid and appeal to the people of Bangladesh to reject them with equal sentiments. No one has any right to rewrite the history of Bangladesh Liberation War.

Climate change challenges

It is never too early to initiate remedial measures

EXPERTS opine that we are two decades too late in undertaking remedies to counter the adverse effects of global climate change although remedies were at hand over the last 20 years. It hardly needs reemphasizing that our security will be greatly impaired by the degradation of the state of our environment and of our economy because of the effect of climate change brought about by global warming.

Like it or not, climate change is a reality. But its harmful impact can and must be attenuated. However, the most unfortunate aspect of it is that it is not countries that are responsible for causing global warming that will bear the brunt of consequences of its aftermath. It is the poorer countries that are at the receiving end of the deleterious effects that will accrue over time.

And it is the poorest in the poorer countries that will have to bear the heavy cost if steps are not initiated immediately. And if one were to go by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predictions which experts say are the best guide to future shape of the global environment, things are going to get worse since we can expect, with things as they are, a temperature rise of between two and four and half degree Celsius. Therefore, the time to act is now.

For Bangladesh it is very bad news since land and agriculture, on which the majority of our people subsist, will be the worst affected, not to speak of the large areas of forest that stands the risk of decimation coupled with declining availability of fresh water.

The time to act is now and we are heartened by the government's focus on the indigents by its recently initiated project on 'Community-based adaptation to climate change through coastal afforestation'. It hardly needs to be said also that while the worst affected countries must formulate environment friendly development plans, the cost of ameliorating the consequences of global warming is indeed very high for the poorer countries to bear by themselves; it must be shared by the more affluent countries that are primarily responsible for the current state of global environment.

Charland and right of the landless

Md ABDUL KADER

CHARLANDS in Bangladesh is a unique asset. This extensive stretch of resource can play an extraordinary role in reducing poverty of a huge number landless people of the country. But till date government not being in absolute control of the charlands and most of these being in possession of a section of land-grabbers and not properly distributed among the actual landless poor, the effective utilisation of thousands of acres of charlands in overall poverty reduction and economic growth of the country could not be achieved. Specially because hundreds of acres of land due to alluvial accretion in rivers not being included in Khas Khatian and not handed over to the actual landless through proper distribution, no expected result has been found in rural poverty alleviation. But proper and correct utilisation of charland could have set a considerably positive trend in effective alleviation of rural poverty.

According to various sources, the amount of charland due to alluvion is more than two thousand square kilometres in the country. But unfortunately, most of this huge amount of charland is in grab of so-called political leaders and activists, local landlords and a section called

'land-terrorists'. And because of them the actual char dwellers are living like parasites on their own land. According to various sources, 70 to 75 lakh people dwell on different chars in the country now. Sixty percent of these people are absolutely landless having neither agricultural nor homestead land.

In Bangladesh there are about two hundred fifty rivers -- small and large combined. These include fierce Padma, Meghna, Jamuna as well as quiet Madhumati, Kumar, Ichhamati. However, once upon a time all rivers -- small and big -- in Bangladesh were evenly flowing, but over time with the accumulation of silt many of them have lost their force. Every year there occurs alluvial accretion in different rivers. Subject to geographic situation these accretions are of two kinds: island in mean river and shore along bank. On the other hand these are also of two kinds according to duration -- permanent or old and temporary or prone to erosion.

There are innumerable accretions of chars in the rivers of Bangladesh. Of these the largest portion of charland is in the Jamuna. However, at present most accretion has occurred at the confluence of the Meghna. In districtwise consideration Noakhali experienced more such accretion than anywhere over

Improving our image abroad



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

other non-traditional areas. However, the important thing to note here is that most of our favourable publicity and image building has been due to non-governmental sectors.

The last few years of political governance contributed very little to our international image. Every year, we topped the list of corrupt countries in the international corruption perception index and also gradually emerged as a significant terrorist-prone country where

introduction of the national ID card scheme and the correction of the existing voters roll. These are significant. They will hopefully help to bolster better governance. These have been in the right direction, but much more still needs to be done.

Some of the analysts in the print media have quite correctly pointed out in this regard that Bangladesh might no longer be the 3rd most corrupt country but it is still in the tied position of being the 7th most

national optimism in this regard will be proved right next time the international reckoning comes along. If this happens, it will enhance our pride in ourselves and be an example to follow in the future. It will also be a source of great encouragement for those involved in governance so that we can climb the index quicker.

The other report to be referred to is the Global Survey 2008 on 'Doing Business' as prepared by the IFC and the World Bank. Bangladesh

ports and revenue generation. The measures being taken in this regard however need to be expanded and intensified. The government should seriously consider setting up a Commission composed of representatives from the trading community, the entrepreneurial community, the workers, the banking community, the insurance community and the relevant institutions of the government to determine the areas where we are weak and the steps needed

representatives can file complaints and expect answer in less than 72 hours. We have to get a move on in this competitive world. Otherwise we will fall behind. This report suggests that entrepreneurs have to spend 1,442 days for enforcing business contracts in Bangladesh. The world average requirement is 990 days. I am certain that this excess delay in our case is mostly due to corruption and therefore that much unacceptable.

We have made changes and improved ourselves in container handling at ports. That is good. However, we have to do a little bit more. We have to make the doing of business simpler by cutting red tape and reducing the number of stages and permissions that are required for this purpose. We have to strengthen property rights, enhance investor protection, increase access opportunities with regard to credit and ease tax processes. We have to expedite trade while reducing concomitant costs.

We are re-building institutions and re-laying the foundations for a meaningful and functional democracy. There is considerable interest all over the world in what we are presently doing, not only among human rights activists but also among academics and those interested in the upholding of the due process of law. Ours is an example of crisis management that will be studied very carefully throughout our region and also in the developing world in general.

The job of this commission should be to seriously examine and evaluate our existing drawbacks in important areas like starting a business, issuing of licences, principles pertaining to employment of workers and according them their privileges as expected under existing law, registration of property, obtaining of credit from financial institutions (both in the private and public sectors), facilitating protection of investors, payment of different kinds of taxes and duties, enforcement of contracts and in the closing down of businesses.

We have a real challenge in our hands.

The current interim administration, by the very nature of its formation and composition is technocratic in character. In their own way, they are trying to streamline the various facets of economic activity. In this context, they are trying to restore some sanity within our regulatory mechanism. Special emphasis is being given to transport, energy, clearance facilities in

to overcome the obstacles. As in the case of the Board of Investment, it should be under the direct purview of the office of the chief adviser/prime minister.

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This Commission should meet on a regular basis and help in the resolution of problems. It should, if necessary, also have a complaints centre where concerned trading

It is no secret that Benazir had to compromise with the military junta to return home. This understanding will come in the way of true democratic government. She would soon find out that the military is more entrenched than before, and that military foundations command 70 percent of Pakistan's economy, both business and industry.

The only bright spot in her return is the declaration that she would fight terrorism, the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, with all her force if and when she returns to power. It is going to be a difficult job because religious parties have widened and deepened their influence. Musharraf is not going to allow their elimination because he may use them as the counterforce to curb Benazir. Still, whatever she can do in combating terrorism is welcome because the entire region faces the danger of extremists coming to the top. New Delhi will specially welcome it because its perception is that Pakistan's ISI is at the back of terrorism in the world.

If she can curb terrorism in Pakistan she will be forgiven for all her sins. Here, too, Washington is watching her closely because it has stitched the arrangement between Musharraf and Benazir Bhutto. Yet, the deal alone is not enough. Her promise to give roti, kapada our makan is what will endear her to people. Mrs Indira Gandhi too once promised that she would end poverty if people were to return her to power. They did so but poverty was not even dented fractionally.

Kulidip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

POST BREAKFAST

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OUR battered image has been the subject of intense discussion over the last two weeks. We have had the latest Transparency International (TI) World Corruption Perception Index Report and then the Global Survey Report entitled 'Doing Business' as prepared jointly by the International Finance Corporation and the World Bank. The publication of these reports more or less coincided with the visit to New York of our chief adviser. He was there to attend and participate in the 62nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly. He also used the opportunity of being in New York to address students and academics in the Columbia University.

In recent years Bangladeshi image abroad has been one of contrast. We have been buffeted by reports that the country is riddled with corruption and lack of governance. We have had reports of being subject to natural calamities and being mired in poverty. We have also had the national pride of Professor M Yunus and the Grameen Bank winning the Nobel Prize for Peace for his revolutionary concept of micro-credit. In addition, we have also gained very favourable publicity from the activities carried out by BRAC in the field of informal education and their efforts in promoting rural employment opportunities for women in traditional crafts and

extremist organisations had no hesitation in targeting and assassinating politicians, judges and ordinary citizens (all this with the indirect connivance of state machinery and politicians in power). Lack of transparency permitted wasteful expenditure of state funds in partisan causes. Lack of accountability allowed the government to appoint lobbyists who were charged with putting a spin on abuse of governance.

The past few months have however seen a desperate attempt to restore some order within the national paradigm. This has included many constructive steps - re-constitution of the Election Commission, the strengthening of the Anti-Corruption Commission into a meaningful institution, the overhaul of the Central Public Service Commission, efforts towards the separation of the judiciary from the executive, the

corrupt in the controversial world corruption perception index (along with Cambodia, Central African Republic, Papua New Guinea, Turkmenistan and Venezuela). However what is important is that Bangladesh still retains the dubious distinction of being bottom of the South Asian scorecard with the same corruption perception score of 2 (of last year) despite the current intensive anti-corruption drive and institutional reforms undertaken within the country.

Relevant representatives of Transparency International in Dhaka have tried to explain that the score has remained unchanged because of the reports and statistical data pertaining to 2006. They have also mentioned that the effect of the anti-corruption drive undertaken since January this year will, in all likelihood, be reflected in the next report. I hope that our

appears to have slid down 18 places to 107 among 178 countries in terms of ease of doing business in a country. What is even more depressing is that Bangladesh's standing deteriorated in nine indicators out of ten. It was disgraceful. It was reflection of the corruption, partisanship, lack of accountability and absence of due process of law that characterised the administrative activities of the past BNP government.

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Damage has already been done



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

NEW Delhi and Islamabad are trying to salvage whatever is left from the recent deals they have had. India has put its nuclear deal with America on hold in the hope that the passage of time would whitewash the opposition. Pakistan has a bigger problem because President General Pervez Musharraf's deal with Benazir Bhutto to have a joint deal with

push them till the approval of the next budget (April 2008). Then, even if they were to withdraw support, the general election would be only a year away from the due date -- May 2009. The Election Commission requires at least six months for preparations.

The deals, even when discussed, had their ups and downs. Too much was sought to be compressed in too little a space. Yet, necessity more than persistence overcame the difficulties met almost at every

altar of a nuclear deal. The Left has negotiated with the non-BJP parties to put up a joint front in the next session of parliament to prove that the government does not have a majority behind the deal.

On the other hand, America's pressure has not diminished. It has set a year-end deadline to wrap up negotiations with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Its eyes are fixed on selling nuclear

step. While negotiating the deals, India and Pakistan assumed many things but found them lacking actuality when tested on the stone of reality.

Mannohar Singh was embarrassed when he found ministers in his coalition government against the operationalisation of the nuclear deal, even though they had supported it in the earlier cabinet meeting. The Left was dead set against the deal from the day one. Their stand to withdraw support from the government did not surprise Mannohar Singh. He kept talking to them and is still doing so. His calculation may be that he can

like that of Mrs Indira Gandhi for one and a half years in 1969, and of Narasimha Rao two decades later. In fact, the prime minister threw down the gauntlet to the Left, and his party's president Sonia Gandhi said that those who opposed the deal were the enemies of the country.

What made the Congress cave in was the opposition of coalition members. M Karunanidhi from Tamil Nadu, Sharad Pawar from Maharashtra and Lalu Prasad Yadav from Bihar argued that they would like to have the full term, one and a half years more, and not sacrifice the government at the

energy plants worth billions of dollars.

At worst, America's loss is that the order for energy plants may be delayed. But India has lost much more: it has signed some preliminary agreements to the deal; more than that it had its face blackened from the day it voted against Iran at a meeting of the IAEA, and that too after the US ambassador's warning to New Delhi not to even abstain in view of "America's sensitivities."

It is apparent that the deal in India may die in due course, or take some other shape to allay reservations. But the terrorists' attack has put a question mark against the Musharraf-Benazir deal. Benazir has come to suspect the hand of some elements in the government. That is the reason why she wants some foreign agencies to be associated with the inquiry Musharraf has ordered. Understandably, the government has not agreed to this. Benazir may consider the inquiry under the supervision of the Supreme Court. India has had one.

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But for her to say that her return means the return of democracy is hard to gulp down. She has herself accepted joint governance with the military. The khaki cannot be mixed with shervani in a people's government. Even otherwise, normal rights are going to be hard to establish in a country where the pre-eminence of military rules has come to be accepted. The very word, democracy, has been mutilated and because of a series of dictatorships at Islamabad, democracy has come to mean "guided democracy." And

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BETWEEN THE LINES

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remain poor as before or even worse. The char dwellers complain that there is no policy for proper utilisation of charland and the Alluvion-Diluvium Act being too complex to comprehend, the absolute right of landless farmers and fishermen could not be established on charland. Continuation of an improper land administration for decade after decade has just not brought any ease and affluence in the lives of millions of charland dwellers. Should we wait more to effect any proper land reform?

We think it is more than high time to establish the right of the landless on all charland khas resources. And for this the following suggestions may be brought under consideration.

• All new accretion of charlands should be brought under government control/supervision forthwith and data of all charlands properly

maintained and districtwise amount of charland updated each year.

• Diara survey of charland should be done quickly and civil society including poorman's organisations involved in the work. Proper charland utilisation policy should be adopted and central and local level charland management committees formed. Participation of the poor and the marginalised as well as farmers' representatives in these committees should be ensured.</p