

It was a War of Liberation not a civil war

Nation must resist all attempts to denigrate it

ONLY the day before yesterday Mr. Mojaheed, the Jamaat secretary-general unabashedly denied that there were any war criminals or anti-liberation forces in Bangladesh.

And lo and behold, yesterday an erstwhile secretary to the government, whose comments about 1971 make him appear to be of the same ilk as Jamaat, had the temerity to characterise the nine-month long struggle as a civil war while participating in a talk show hosted by a private TV channel! We cannot believe that the gentleman is unaware of the criteria that constitute a civil war. We resent his dubious attempt to confuse the issue after 35 years.

Ours was the culmination of a struggle for independence that took roots in 1948, manifested through the language movement and subsequent struggles against the iniquitous rule by the Pakistani military junta. 1971 was not an internecine war but a war of liberation, a resistance against an occupation army, that was participated by all and sundry, both in and outside the country. There was no divide among us; we were united as one nation after March 26 and the beginning of genocide, except of course the likes of Jamaat and its cohorts.

We cannot but feel that these comments, some of which were made with the arrogance of an unrepentant collaborator let off the hook, appear as if they have been well planned and well orchestrated to launch an assault on the very spirit of our war of independence.

These utterances have denigrated our Liberation War. We reject both the notions. We feel that there has never been an actor comment in recent times that deserved more contempt than these. We join the nation in expressing our utmost disdain.

We regret that old wounds have been reopened. In belittling 1971 the blood of the martyrs has been defiled. It is a sad story that those who had helped in the carnage in 1971 have the gumption to renew their assault on the nation. It is because they have been politically rehabilitated. Are we not to be blamed for allowing them the political space because of the very narrow partisan interest of one political party or the other?

Those that have allowed these collaborators to reestablish themselves must reexamine their position, and all those that helped the occupation forces in the mayhem in 1971 must accept their role and seek forgiveness from the nation for their misdeeds.

Yaba addiction

Its extent and nature horrifying

THE crackdown on Yaba peddlers by Rab has exposed the magnitude of the problem of drug use among the affluent youths in the city. Kudos to the Rab team. The details pouring in are mind-boggling, to say the least. Moral degeneration has reached an abysmal state, without our even knowing what has been going on. The situation has turned critical, as addiction looks like threatening a whole generation of youths.

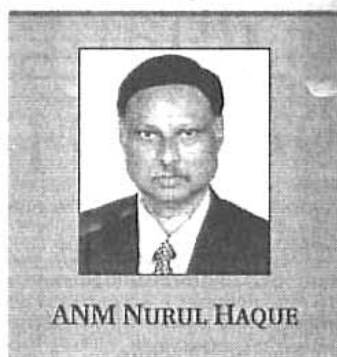
The law enforcers' action has apparently forced the drug peddlers to change their modus operandi, and they are now recruiting new operatives to keep the business alive. Obviously, the supply lines have to be cut off to ensure that the deadly drugs don't reach any customer. The illegal business has grown big and the law enforcers will have to make some determined efforts to contain it.

There is more worrying news. So far, the general impression was that Bangladesh was being used as a transit route by the drug smugglers. But it is now clear that the number of local users has increased manifold. Worse still, drugs like Yaba are being produced locally! That's also an indication that a huge number of youths have become regular customers of such intoxicants.

The question might now arise what the narcotics department had been doing while the drug business thrived. Evidently, the surveillance on production, supply or marketing of such drugs was poor, if at all there was anybody to bother about the ominous proliferation of the drug. Another point that seems to be rather baffling is that the Yaba trade was being conducted by youths from rich and socially well-placed families. Were they powerful enough to neutralise the enforcement of law? What else can we surmise from the way the Yaba trade was going on?

Whatever might be the reason behind the malignant growth of drug trade and abuse, it has to be stopped in order to save our youths from self-destruction. The law enforcers have already arrested a number of suspected drug peddlers. And we expect that soon they will be able to identify and catch the godfathers who might have been controlling the business from behind the scene. Drug abuse has to be prevented at any cost, if we don't want to find ourselves ensnared with a social menace of the most unmanageable type.

Expatriate voting rights



ANM NURUL HAQUE

IT is really heartening that the Election Commission (EC) has initiated a move to include the expatriate Bangladeshis in the electoral roll to provide them with the opportunity of casting vote for their chosen candidates from abroad. The EC has already reviewed the concerned laws and decided to make some amendments in the Representation of the People Order 1972 for this purpose.

Meanwhile, the EC has initiated of holding dialogues with expatriate Bangladeshis residing in UK to assess the possibility of enrolling them as voters. Two election commissioners are expected to participate in the dialogues, scheduled to be held in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Edinburgh in the second week of November. These dialogues will be held under the supervision of the Bangladesh High Commission in UK.

Initially the EC will hold the dialogues in UK as the highest number of Bangladeshi expatriates live there. The EC will next

In addition to voting for their representatives in Paris, the French expatriates elect a High Council of French citizens resident abroad. This body, which regularly meets government officials, elects 12 senators to look after expatriates' interests. France really values its expatriates.

discuss the ways to enroll the expatriates living in other countries. It is estimated that more than four million Bangladeshi expatriates are presently living in UK and other countries.

A powerful lobbying group of the Bangladeshi expatriates have been demanding for inclusion of their names in the electoral roll for a long time enabling them to exercise their voting right. An eight-member delegation of expatriates from the Middle East countries also recently met the CEC and expressed their desire to be enrolled as voters.

The Bangladeshi expatriates also launched a movement for their voting rights before holding the 2001 parliamentary election. M. A. Sayed, the then CEC took up the issue of making them voters. But he had to abandon the project citing some complications.

In the age of globalisation, the expatriate voting right exists in many countries across the world. Expatriate voting rights have also been introduced in many countries with a view to gain party political advantage.

All the members of European Union (EU) except Britain have written constitutions that stipu-

late, directly or by reference to specific laws, the voting rights of their citizens. Thus citizens cannot be deprived of their inalienable rights without either constitutional legislation passed by a large majority, referendums or even elections.

Most of the European countries, especially the EU members, have given their expatriates voting rights of unlimited duration. Denmark has given a five-year limit and Germany a 25-year limit for their nationals living outside Europe. Britain provided a 20-year limit which has been reduced to 15 years later on. The British expatriates are now campaigning to have voting right regardless of the length of time they have lived abroad.

The concerned minister has sent recently the draft bill laying down the groundwork for the voting rights to Greek citizens living abroad. Expatriate Greeks will be granted voting rights, provided they are registered to the electoral rolls.

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regularly meets government officials, elects 12 senators to look after expatriates' interests. France really values its expatriates.

The British citizens who live outside the United Kingdom can vote in UK and European parliamentary elections (but not local elections), provided they have lived in the UK within the last fifteen years and they can provide a British citizen also living outside the UK, who is not a close relative, to witness their application form.

British citizens are registered to vote in the constituency in which they were registered when last living in the UK, or, for those too young to have registered when they left the UK, in the constituency where their parents or guardian were registered.

There are at least 650,000 British citizens residing in EU countries, and 840,000 expatriates worldwide who receive UK pensions. There are 26,000 expatriates in the Gulf states alone. Those registered may vote either in person, by proxy or by post.

Expatriate voting is very common within the Europe. It is especially important for a country like

Bangladesh where the number of expatriates is in the millions. But assessing the actual number and location of the expatriates worldwide is really a big problem, as they usually do not register their names with the Bangladesh consulates abroad.

On the other hand, most of the expatriates have no idea of their voting rights while living abroad. A poster explaining the modalities by which the expatriates will be made voters and which will answer the questions expatriates ask about voting, should be prepared and publicised widely. The EC should launch a web site exclusively for the expatriates' information from which one can download the poster, the voter registration form and obtain other information.

Bangladesh has two types of expatriates -- one who are staying abroad temporarily and the other who are living permanently, having dual citizenship. There is a third type, who have become citizens of other countries surrendering Bangladeshi citizenship. Obviously, this type of Bangladeshis does not come within the purview of expatriate voting rights.

There are expatriates holding dual citizenship and consequently able to vote in the host country. It is hard then to argue that their political participation in the home country is necessary either to secure their democratic rights or to ensure their democratic inclusiveness in a home polity which has seen a great deal of emigration.

Obviously there are various principles that could be applied while deciding whether the expatriates would be allowed to exercise their right of franchise. The EC could also follow the procedures of other countries in setting up the rules.

The expatriate Bangladeshi community is deprived of their constitutional right to vote as we do not have any provision to include them in the national electoral roll. The expatriate voting right is, of course, a global phenomenon and is not a difficult exercise. Therefore, it is quite undemocratic to disfranchise such a large number of citizens in the plea that they are expatriates.

The money remitted by the expatriates is a prominent source of foreign currency for Bangladesh, second only to the garment industry. Their contribution to the economic development of the country is undeniable. It is therefore proper for the country to do something in return for them and that can be done by providing them with voting rights.

The EC really deserves thank for floating the idea of providing the expatriates with their long-denied voting rights. We urge it not to abandon the idea as it was done in the 2001 election. Providing voting rights to expatriates will certainly reflect the caring attitude of this interim government towards the expatriates, whose contribution to the economy is a crucial necessity.

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China and India: Same road, different destinies

Considering the old pull of border issues and the competition over natural resources as well as a still-fluid international system, the looming issue for Asia and the rest of the world is how New Delhi and Beijing will manage the ups and downs of tectonic economic shifts and the potential for their competing world views.

SCOTT B. MACDONALD

IN late September 2007, a leading financial analyst opined that Chindia "stands for China plus India, rather than China versus India." That may be so for now, but over time the "plus" will evolve to "versus" on many levels. For all of the talk around the idea of Chindia -- the merging of China and India into one great complex of dynamic economic development -- the path of Asia's two giants is more likely to diverge.

Simply stated, China and India are different countries that happen to be on the same road of globalisation. The contrasts will only sharpen as Asia's two most populous countries pursue national interests that are likely to collide over issues such as access to markets, natural resources and strategic partners.

The core differences between China and India are political. China's political leadership confronts substantial challenges in the management of popular aspirations: It must maintain rapid economic growth based on investment and exports, at the expense of wages and consumption, while controlling most aspects of political expression. The downside is that demonstrations and riots have become the domain for discontent. In 1989, pro-democracy demonstrations

at Tiananmen Square rocked the government until they were crushed by the military, an event that left its mark on the Chinese Communist Party.

In contrast, India's approach allows for more open debate over societal aspirations and goals. When Indians are discontent with government policies, they have the option to change leaders peacefully. The downside is often unwieldy coalition governments that make implementing policies difficult. All the same, India has avoided the regime-threatening upheaval of a Tiananmen Square and Indians retain confidence in using the ballot box.

Determining which approach has been more successful in improving people's lives and managing the process of globalisation depends on the set of factors examined: economic growth, poverty reduction, political stability, business expansion, and conflict or compromise.

In China, the high rates of economic growth have led to substantial decreases in poverty rates while, in India, poverty reduction has been more modest. According to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, between 1981 and 2004, there was an estimated decline in the absolute number of extreme poor in China of more than 500 million people, while in India, the number of extreme poor remained

roughly constant.

Indian democracy's embrace of globalisation and more market-oriented policies have not reduced extreme poverty, while China's authoritarianism has delivered the economic goods. But India's open-door economic experiment has been in motion for a shorter period of time.

In addition, there have not been the extreme ranges of socio-economic experimentation in India as in China. That experimentation included the infamous Great Leap Forward, the ill-fated Backyard Furnace Campaign and forced communalisation, which resulted in famine and the death of an estimated 30 million people. Also, India's relative lack of achievement in many social areas is largely unrelated to globalisation. Rather, the delivery of social services is complicated by domestic political problems, bloated bureaucracies and corruption, all of which predate globalisation. If anything, globalisation has made Indians aware of what can be achieved, especially when their nation is compared to China.

Although India's political life is complicated by corruption and religious/ethnic differences, the country's political system has managed to uphold an electoral system that provides the foundation for much of the give-and-

take of parliamentary politics. The system allows an escape valve for public frustrations. Unlike its neighbours, India has not been subject to military coups or civil wars. Even when Indira Gandhi declared the Indian Emergency in 1975 and the country flirted with authoritarianism, India steered back to elective politics in 1977.

The two nations loom large in the geo-politics of Asia. China has a close relationship with Pakistan, assisting in the development of that country's nuclear program, and building influence in Burma. This is not to argue that India and China sit on the edge of a new conflict; if anything, relations are probably the warmest they have been in a long time.

Sino-Indian relations started to thaw in 2000, gaining greater momentum with the visits of top officials from both countries, including Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's 2003 travel to Beijing. In 2004, trade between the two countries topped \$10 billion for the first time, and in 2006, Nathula, an ancient trade route that was part of the historic Silk Road, reopened for the first time since the 1962 Sino-Indian War.

The Chindia theme was underscored in 2006, when China's premier Wen Jiabao declared that China and India will be a source of economic power in the 21st century. "Cooperation is just like two pagodas -- one hardware and one software."

Chinese and Indian businesses are likely to become rivals. Currently China easily dominates in manufacturing, while India dominates the service sector.

However, China seeks to move further into services and India into manufacturing. Indeed, India has been consistently criticised for not further developing its industrial sector to make a more balanced economy. That process is beginning to gain momentum as reflected by the globalisation of such firms as Tata Motors (automotives), Vedanta Resources (metals and mining), Hindalco (metals) and Dr. Reddy Laboratories (pharmaceuticals). From oil exploration to revitalising Africa's mining industry, Indian and Chinese companies increasingly bump into each other on faraway points of the map, such as Zambia, West Africa and Latin America.

While the two-pagoda theme, where China runs the industrial pagoda and India the service one, serves as a cordial veneer to Sino-Indian relations, there remains considerable cause for rivalry. China started the processes of globalisation and economic development earlier and has a more broadly diversified export base. India is catching up, driven by its service sector, and is also making headway on the industrial side.

Furthermore, Indian takeovers of Western assets occur with much less opposition than China's as the South Asian country is a more comfortable fit -- politically, as a fellow democracy; linguistically, with English; and socially, as a member state of the Commonwealth. China has little desire to strictly remain the hardware pagoda, and India has little intention to remain the software pagoda. Both countries have competent companies moving

into both sectors.

In a sense, China seems to desire that India remain a regional power that can be contained. For its part, India has greater aspirations, especially as its companies enjoy a period of global expansion. The aspirations of the two nations portend a future of growing rivalry, in which both countries will seek to advance their national interests generally by offering market and capital, and through the projection of soft power, but with military power in the background.

Considering the old pull of border issues and the competition over natural resources as well as a still-fluid international system, the looming issue for Asia and the rest of the world is how New Delhi and Beijing will manage the ups and downs of tectonic economic shifts and the potential for their competing world views.

We do know that India's democracy will result in a change of government in a relatively orderly fashion; changes of government in China are much more of a Byzantine affair, and discontent with market-Leninism opens the door to decisions being made in the street rather than in the voting booth, the ramifications of which will impact everyone in Asia and put to rest any notion of Chindia condominium.

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Where does the buck stop?

The government leadership, political or otherwise, must devise its own ways of choosing between alternatives, and once it has made a decision it must bear the full responsibility of all the ramifications of that decision. The onus is on it if it has chosen the wrong kind of experts and listened to the wrong kind of advice in arriving at a decision. It should not be squeamish about accepting responsibility of a failure when it loses no time in claiming credit for any success.

M. A. TASLIM

THE law adviser has reportedly lamented that economists have not provided the government with the correct policy advice. It is not clear whether the adviser meant the economists within the government or those without. Given that self-criticism is almost unknown in the government, one may take the liberty to assume he pointed fingers at the economists not in the government as culpable for the wrong, or less than useful, advice.

Economists are not a lot that are known for unanimity of their views. An oft-repeated

joke about them is that if you ask two economists about a problem they come up with three answers! There are several schools of thought in economics; each has its special methodology of analysing economic problems and the recommendations are not necessarily the same as that of the others.

More importantly, the general lack of education and knowledge has promoted the culture of each citizens' group in the country discovering and promoting its own brand of "experts" or "renowned" scholars regardless of their credentials or qualifications. Hence, it is a bit sweeping to say that economists have not

provided the right answer. What the adviser probably had in mind is that the particular economists that the government sought advice from, or chose to listen to, have not provided the right advice. It is quite unfair to put the blame on others who did not share these economists' views, and indeed are known to have contradicted them.

Two major policy measures that have landed the government in the soup are the ill-conceived drive against hoarding in order to contain inflation and the crusade against corruption. The government seems to have acted without first grasping the complexities of the problems. Those who advised the

government on the issue obviously neglected to inform about the economic consequences of such measures in a market economy.

Every bout of increase in the prices of the essential goods has brought forth with unfailing regularity the claim that a shadowy syndicate was restricting (hoarding) supplies to earn abnormal profits at the expense of the hapless public. This hoarding hypothesis has all the traits of what Galbraith disparagingly calls "conventional wisdom." It sounds plausible and can be defended at the superficial level, it is convenient that does not require much mental exercise, and it finds a scapegoat for a difficult problem that is not amenable to an easy solution, and it has the added advantage that the scapegoat is universally despised. Because of the superficial plausibility of the wisdom many professionals would be reluctant to reject it outright without solid empirical evidence and

analytical refutation. These could be obtained only if a thorough study was carried out by credible professional economists and the findings were vetted by their peers. This has never been done.

I have personally written several papers during the last three years (including one in the law adviser's family newspaper) pointing out the weaknesses of the syndicate hypothesis based on my observation and theoretical insights. But a rigorous refutation of the hypothesis was not possible without an empirical exercise. Accordingly I had repeatedly suggested that the government should undertake a rigorous study on the issue to find out the real reasons for the price hike. Unfortunately the government chose to ride with the conventional wisdom that landed it and the economy in this messy situation.

The crusade against corruption appears to be to a large extent politically motivated, but it has massive economic impli-

cations. Whoever advised the government on this issue misled it if they did not emphasise the economic consequences of too energetic a drive against corruption. An international conference was held jointly by a think tank of the government, BIDS (unfortunately the government mostly ignores it) and the World Bank on governance issues only a few weeks before the political changeover. The papers read in that conference could have given the government a glimpse into the intractable complexity of the governance problems and the difficulties of dealing with them. A persistent theme to emerge from that conference was that governance cannot be improved upon (or corruption could not be reduced) without improving, or creating, institutions that support good governance. This can be achieved only slowly over a period of time.

The roots of corruption have penetrated too deep and wide into the socio-economic and

political fabric of the society. Any attempt to root it out immediately would severely rupture the fabric. The consequent turmoil could easily dissipate whatever economic gains were expected to be had from such an attempt. Good intentions are no guarantee of success; the path to disaster is often strewn with good intentions.

If the government had consulted the right economists they must have warned them about the risks (and gains) of an anti-corruption drive. If so, the government should have foreseen that outcome that we have today. The law adviser's disappointment with the economists would appear to be misplaced.

I recall a conversation I had with a very senior government official a couple of years ago. He said very unhappily that the economists always gave different answers to the same problem; so how could the government take the correct decision? This was a genuine concern of a policy-maker and my instant

reply was that the final decision always lies with the government leadership, and when they assume leadership they implicitly also assume the responsibility of the final decision-making and the consequences. I have subsequently pondered hard over this issue but could not improve much upon this instant answer.

The government leadership, political or otherwise, must devise its own ways of choosing between alternatives, and once it has made a decision it must bear the full responsibility of all the ramifications of that decision. The onus is on it if it has chosen the wrong kind of experts and listened to the wrong kind of advice in arriving at a decision. It should not be squeamish about accepting responsibility of a failure when it loses no time in claiming credit for any success.

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