

The missing 1971 documents

Unravel the truth, hold the responsible to account

THE news that historical documents like the handwritten proclamation of our independence on April 10, 1971 and the formation of Mujibnagar government, a week later, have gone missing from government custody has left us dumbfounded. The cabinet division where the priceless historical papers were stored owes an explanation to the nation as to how the documents, that were testimony to the glorious war of liberation, could be lost. Besides, pertinently, why were these not handed over to the national archives for preservation in the first place?

It is more than an issue of preserving some inanimate objects; it is a question of how we view the papers that actually shaped our political destiny during the most crucial phase of our collective struggle and existence back in 1971. If these sacred documents could be lost due to sheer negligence and callousness, we as a nation will be hard pressed to prove our sincerity and honesty while reminiscing about and taking pride in the liberation war and the supreme sacrifices that went into the making of history in 1971.

Now, the cabinet division officials have expressed their ignorance about the matter. They discovered the mysterious disappearance of the original copies of the proclamation of independence and some momentous events of 1971 while handing over the documents to the National Archives on April 2 this year. Evidently, only the photocopies were handed over. It seems the officials do not know exactly when the documents went missing, which makes it amply clear that there was no periodic checking, which was necessary to protect the documents.

Retired government officials, who were in the cabinet division immediately after the country became independent, have stated that the possibility of foul play could not be ruled out. The documents might have been stolen or destroyed by those who were never comfortable with the emergence of an independent Bangladesh or the elements who wanted to cut us off from history.

Clearly, the issue is sensitive enough to warrant a thorough investigation by the government and making the public fully aware of the outcome of the probe, including the circumstances leading to the disappearance of the papers. More importantly, determined efforts must be made to recover the documents and the culprits responsible for the papers' disappearance have to be brought to justice.

Per capita income closer to respectability

But it is too dependent on remittance

WITHIN a matter of four years, our per capita income of US\$ 440 has increased to US\$ 599. Over the last fiscal year alone, the income has risen from US\$ 523 to US\$ 599, only US\$ 151 short of reaching the magic figure of US\$ 750 which will elevate us to middle income country status.

The latest spurt of increase in Gross National Income (GNI) has been attained in spite of the substantive sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, construction and service sectors registering a fall in growth from one to three percentage points. Had the political unrest, corrosive corruption, floods, cyclone Sidr and the inhibitive costs of production not intervened, the per capita income by now would have reached a much respectable figure.

So, where does the rise in per capita income come from? This is attributed to high growth in remittance from Bangladeshi wage earners abroad. Much that we benefit in ranking from the money soaked in the sweat of the brow of the Bangladeshi expatriates, it basically brings up the downside of the poor performance of our mainstream national economy.

Let's not forget, manpower export is a fluctuating sector with its ups and downs depending on the employability and caprice in the host economies. Therefore, alongside consolidating present positions in conventional manpower markets and breaking new grounds for exporting it, we must strive to derive our principal strength from developing the real sectors of our economy.

While acknowledging the contributions of the Bangladeshi wage earners abroad to our economy we badly need to introspect in the same breath as to how far minded have we been in our treatment of the goose that lays the golden egg. When they air their grievances at their work places abroad how responsive our diplomatic missions have been to their plight? They are often harshly treated at the airport for no good reason whereas they should have been greeted with open arms.

A belief gets stronger by the day looking around the tangible contributions made by expatriate communities to the economies of their home countries, that we are lagging behind in tapping the full potential of the NRs. Successive governments have only paid lip service to the vision and agenda nurtured by serious economists for a rapid growth of the NRs' highly prospective role in the national economy.

August 21 grenade attack and the charge sheet

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
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CHARGE sheet in the case of grenade attack on the Awami League leadership has been framed -- following a reinvestigation that was ordered after the assumption of office by the current caretaker government. Although it is not unusual to have series of investigations in one particular case to confirm/reconfirm certain allegations, what causes the matter to stand out in this case is that none of the 20 accused taken in custody during the first investigation finds mention in the charge sheet. They have been set scot-free and replaced by a totally new list of accused.

However, the police authorities could very well have avoided restating a very obvious truism -- that of the object of the attack. Everyone but the most hopeless moron and an inept ignoramus would have failed to see as to who the perpetrators were after. We would much rather have liked to hear the internal and external links of the perpetrators, and the real mastermind.

While the police deserve our thanks for having framed, for want

of a better word, a "genuine" charge-sheet, the entire episode -- that of handling of the matter since the day of the occurrence -- suggests that there is much more to the affair than meets our eyes -- that there are quite a few questions that must be asked and answers demanded of the authorities. There is an element of the sinister and the ugly in the way the case was handled by the 4-party Alliance regime.

To start with, one would like to ask about the status of the findings of the one-man inquiry committee of Justice Abedin in view of the reinvestigation. Because the then alliance government had chosen to keep the commission's findings out of public knowledge, it was the unofficial sources that one had to depend on regarding its findings. In view of the fact that the major thrust of the Joyal Commission's conclusions, that of the involvement of a third country, has been negated by the fact that the reinvestigation says nothing about the

hands of any "enemy" country, one wonders whether the commission was set up with a particular purpose -- that of diverting the course of the investigation.

There is perhaps little doubt that the one-man commission had an agenda also. And its findings were predetermined, as can be assessed from whatever little that has been gleaned from information gained through the public grapevine on the commission's findings. It would, therefore, not be unfair to demand of the government to make public the conclusions of the Commission for the sake of justice, and that cannot be done without determining who all were calling the shots before and after the incident, and the extent of the involvement of state functionaries, if any.

There must also be much more than the IG's assurance that those in the department responsible for diverting the course of investigation will be taken to task. It is hard to believe that the policemen

responsible for laying red herrings to spoil the merit of the case would have dared to do what they did, were it not for the fact that there were powerful people backing them up -- people who had a stake in the outcome of the grenade attack. The investigating policemen certainly were accessories to a grievous crime, which, had the plot succeeded, would have had serious repercussions on the nation -- its stability and its security. What is yet to be exposed is the identity of the mastermind behind the plot.

Pintu's alleged involvement in the incident gives a new twist to the case, and also validates what many had argued about the possibility of an internally sponsored act by some linked with the erstwhile 4-party Alliance government -- though the main sponsors remain unidentified as of now. One hopes that further investigation would reveal all these and more -- if not done already.

However, what is more impor-

tant, and which the government must take into consideration, is that the previous investigation and its conclusions were evidently a sham. What was conducted in the name of investigation was obviously designed to divert the focus and put the blame on helpless individuals -- and that is why the concocted involvement of "Joi Mia." He is supposed to have given a confessional statement, admitting to carrying out the attack, although the government at the time was quick to discount any suggestion that the attack was directed against the AL leader. As it turns out, the so-called confessional statements were obtained under duress.

It is an unheard of practice that the family of the prime accused involved in conducting a terrorist attack aimed to take out the leadership of a major political party, that eventually took more than 20 lives, and crippled, some permanently, more than 200 people, had been provided with government stipend for a long time.

Therefore, it is not merely enough to have framed the charge sheet only. It is also not enough to say that the policemen, who conducted the first enquiry and abetted in the distortion of the case, will be made to account for their action. It must be understood that they were acting at the bidding of some powerful bigwigs. We hope that the second round of the inquiry on which the charge sheet has been framed has been able to establish a prima-facie case against those that were pulling the strings in the background. We do

not know. But the country cannot brook any laxity in this regard because there is a powerful nexus between these terrorists and their masters inside the country. And if left un-tackled might resurface with attacks against other targets that they find to be against what they feel is their interest.

One regrets to point out that there has been a systemic failure in the police department also in so far as this case is concerned. It is a fact that the investigation was warped deliberately to hide the actual culprits, and all the 20 or so so-called accused were framed, which could not be recognised by those that were supposed to have scrutinised the reports before allowing the case to be proceeded with, unless of course they were also a party to the sham inquiry.

It can be said that had there been no change of government, this case, as with the other cases of terrorist attacks and bombings in Bangladesh, would have remained unresolved -- in fact for all one can say, some innocent people would have been hanged -- and that would be a grave travesty of justice.

One feels that the government's work is cut out in this case. It must direct all intelligence efforts to unearth the masterminds behind the attack, who must be put in the dock. It must be done for the sake of justice. The sooner that happens the quicker will we be able to deal with the other similar cases successfully.

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Learning from the oil shock

What to do? How can we retrieve some of our lost power? The first thing is to get out of denial. Stop blaming oil companies, "speculators" and other scapegoats for a situation not of their making. Next, we need to expand oil and natural-gas drilling in the United States, including Alaska. No, we can't "drill our way" out of this problem. But we can augment oil supplies and lessen price strains on global markets. It might take 10 years or more, because new projects are huge undertakings. But delay will only aggravate our future problems, just as past errors aggravate present problems.

ROBERT J. SAMUELSON

THE world may have arrived at the equivalent of Peak Oil. Old fields are in decline, while governments limit new oil projects.

We all know that gasoline is at \$4 a gallon and oil is at \$135 a barrel. But if you think that's the end of the story, don't talk to economist Jeffrey Rubin of CIBC World Markets. By Rubin's reckoning, we've barely passed the halfway point on a steady march upward that will take gasoline to \$7 a gallon and oil to \$225 by 2012. Though there will be fluctuations, the underlying rise in prices, he says, will have pervasive and often surprising side effects. Among them:

US manufacturers benefit, because rising ocean-freight costs -- reflecting fuel prices -- make imports more expensive. Some production returns to the United States, and some shifts from Asia to closer exporters

(Mexico over China). Since 2000, estimates Rubin, the cost of shipping a 40-foot container from East Asia has gone from \$3,000 to \$8,000. With oil at \$200 a barrel, the shipping cost would be \$15,000. Already, he says, China's steel exports to the United States are falling while US production is rising.

Inflation becomes more stubborn and harder to control. For years, the Federal Reserve has focused on so-called core inflation -- prices minus energy and food. The justification for ignoring food and energy is that large price changes usually reverse themselves. But if oil and food prices move steadily higher, that logic collapses. "While core inflation may be barely over 2 percent, that's only of solace if you don't eat or drive," Rubin says. Overall inflation is twice that (about 4 percent) and "won't be coming down any time soon."

Two distressed industries --

home building and autos -- suffer further. "In two years, there will be fewer Americans driving," he says. Higher gasoline prices push people to mass transit, bicycles and their feet. Home prices take another hit, especially in distant suburbs with long commutes. "People won't be able to afford what they used to afford," he says.

Do not underestimate oil's fallout. As a practical matter, the world may have arrived at Peak Oil: that condition when dwindling oil reserves no longer permit much, if any, annual increase in production. This may not be literally true; estimates of vast undiscovered oil reservoirs imply that Peak Oil is decades away. But governments that control 75 percent or more of known oil reserves are behaving as if Peak Oil is already here. They're hoarding a scarce commodity by limiting new exploration projects. Meanwhile, production at some old fields is dropping rapidly.

Spare capacity has been depleted, as demand outruns new supply.

High prices close the gap. The grim price outlook by Rubin and others presumes that this situation persists. Of course, they could be wrong if higher prices cause demand to drop sharply and supplies increase unexpectedly (might Iraq surprise with large gains?). In the United States, prices have already led to less driving.

In March -- the latest month available -- highway travel was down 4.3 percent from a year earlier. Buying patterns for vehicles have shifted. Through May, car and light-vehicle sales dropped 8.4 percent from a year earlier, and most of the decline reflected SUVs (down 31 percent) and pickups (21 percent), reports wardsauto.com. Oil demand is also stagnating in Europe and Japan.

But higher demand from developing countries and oil producers is offsetting the lower demand of wealthy countries. Consumption in these countries will rise 3 percent in 2008, or 1.2 million barrels a day, projects the International Energy Agency.

Many of these countries subsidize fuel so that final customers are insulated from price increases. Gasoline is about 25 cents a gallon in Venezuela and

about 60 cents in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iran, notes Rubin. China also subsidizes fuel.

There's been a huge transfer of power to oil producers. Even at \$100 a barrel, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates will earn almost \$8 trillion in oil revenues between now and 2020, estimates the McKinsey Global Institute.

More troubling are the political implications. "This has really strengthened the Iranians, Russians and Venezuelans to be more provocative in the world," says Larry Goldstein of the Energy Policy Research Foundation.

Although governments control crude supplies, private companies have dominated distribution. Anyone can buy oil at a price. Now oil could become a political commodity, used by governments to cement their alliances: offered to friends at a discount; withheld from rivals.

What to do? How can we retrieve some of our lost power? The first thing is to get out of denial. Stop blaming oil companies, "speculators" and other scapegoats for a situation not of their making.

Next, we need to expand oil and natural-gas drilling in the United States, including Alaska. No, we can't "drill our way" out of this problem. But we can aug-

ment oil supplies and lessen price strains on global markets. It might take 10 years or more, because new projects are huge undertakings. But delay will only aggravate our future problems, just as past errors aggravate present problems.

Finally, we need to let high prices work. Aside from encouraging fuel-efficient vehicles and disciplining driving habits, they may also stimulate development of new bio-fuels from wood chips, food waste and switch grass. Production costs of these fuels may be in the range of \$1 a gallon, says David Cole of the Center for Automotive Research.

If true, that's well below today's wholesale gasoline prices. To assure new producers that they wouldn't be wiped out if oil prices plunged, we should set a floor price for oil of \$50 to \$80 a barrel, about 40 percent to 60 percent of today's levels, says Cole.

It's a worthy idea and can be done with a standby tariff. It would activate only if prices hit the threshold. We know that oil prices are unpredictable, and should a price collapse occur, Americans wouldn't be deluded into thinking we've returned permanently to cheap energy. We've made that mistake before.

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Dreams of equity

That, after all, is the point of dreaming. To remind ourselves that alternate realities can be imagined, and if imagined, can be realised. That someday people may tire of a world ruled by giant corporations and their friends -- the World Bank, IMF, WTO. That people may stand up and demand their rights and the rights of their brothers and sisters of all colours and nations and religions. That people may realise that the divisions we create through race, religion, and social standing serve only to make things easier for those who seek to conquer us. That the possessions constantly being advertised will not make us happy, but that a higher state of contentment can come about when we are living in a more equitable world, no longer faced by human suffering and misery, no longer forced to deny the humanity of the poor in order to maintain our own equanimity.

FOZIA AKHTAR

I have a dream. No, not a dream of owning a fancy home or a fast car. Not even one of romance or fame. My dream is far more immodest. I dream of a world where people are valued more than possessions, where nobody goes hungry and nobody is inordinately rich, where basic needs for all are

met, and people of all religions, skin colour, and both sexes get fair treatment because their common humanity is more important than their other qualities.

In such a world, respect will not be a matter of income but of contribution. Those people will be respected who do the most for others, in terms of the work

needed for society to function, such as farming and looking after children, and in terms of their qualities (generosity, kindness), rather than their big incomes.

So it's a crazy dream, but I suspect I'm not alone in dreaming it. Martin Luther King had a similar dream, though more about overcoming racism, which

he spoke out famously in Washington, DC on August 28, 1963. He was assassinated almost five years later, proving that having a dream -- and speaking about it publicly, and working for it -- could be dangerous.

Leaders of various countries have had similar dreams, and have worked for equality in their countries, for decent conditions for everyone. Some of them have been assassinated. American leaders tried to topple Fidel Castro in Cuba and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, without success. In other cases, America has used military might, or the loan programs of the World Bank, to prevent such dreams from becoming reality.

Dreams must be scary things, when they threaten the power structure. Why this dream? Call me funny, but I find it dehumanising to pass people on the streets who don't know if they

will be able to feed themselves or their children that evening, who lack proper shelter, who themselves had no access to school and can't send their children either, and who know that if they or their family members fall sick, they will have no access to decent health care. Call me funny, but I don't feel happy that I have so much and they so little.

I find it wrong. Sometimes I get depressed thinking faraway thoughts about people dying of TB in Russian prisons because the government, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, can no longer afford their care. About indigenous Guatemalans still getting kicked off their land, partly because in the 1950s the CIA assassinated the one leader, Arbenz, who tried to institute land reform. About children orphaned by AIDS because the pharmaceutical companies see nothing unethical about making

large profits selling the drugs that could save people, drugs that are almost exclusively used by the very poor.

It hurts me to think of the G8 nations spending more on a conference to discuss poverty than it would cost to forgive the debt of a few African nations. To know that the flow of money is not from wealthy countries to Africa, but the other way around, with debt servicing amounting to far more than "aid." To know that much of what is called aid goes right back to the country giving the aid, in the form of highly paid consultants, foreign SUVs, and foreign equipment. To know that so much misery and suffering in the world could be overcome so easily, if people only prioritised other people over profits.

A funny little thing happens to me when I get depressed. I start to envy those who don't care or don't seem to notice. Those who

don't believe that the poor, the ill, the oppressed are fully human, that their suffering matters the way that the suffering of a rich person matters. I almost wish I could be like them, believe that I deserve better than others simply because my family had light skin or is well educated or has money. That somehow I've earned my privileges, and others should stop complaining and do the same.

At times like those, I remind myself that a bit of depression is the price I have to pay for having a soul. That it is better to feel the bonds of humanity, and suffer for it, than to live a free and empty existence. That in feeling, I have the possibility of acting, and in acting, I may help to bring about change.

That, after all, is the point of dreaming. To remind ourselves that alternate realities can be imagined, and if imagined, can be realised. That someday peo-

ple may tire of a world ruled by giant corporations and their friends -- the World Bank, IMF, WTO. That people may stand up and demand their rights and the rights of their brothers and sisters of all colours and nations and religions. That people may realise that the divisions we create through race, religion, and social standing serve only to make things easier for those who seek to conquer us. That the possessions constantly being advertised will not make us happy, but that a higher state of contentment can come about when we are living in a more equitable world, no longer faced by human suffering and misery, no longer forced to deny the humanity of the poor in order to maintain our own equanimity.

Dream it.
Live it.

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