

The defeat of the Tamil Tigers

After military triumph, Rajapakse must now win the peace

THE Sri Lankan army has decisively beaten the LTTE in war. With news of the death of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and his close associates coming in (though Tamil sources deny it), there is now confirmation that the government in Colombo is finally and fully in control of the whole island for the first time in more than two decades. That does not mean, though, that peace has at last descended on the island nation. It is a military victory that has been achieved. Now comes the far more important task of winning the peace.

And winning the peace will call for a clear political outline of the future by the government. Rebuilding the country will call for the government to abjure the thought of victor and vanquished, for in the final analysis what matters is the degree to which Colombo will accommodate the Tamils in the future constitutional and administrative framework of the country. The ferocity of the war the LTTE, also known as the Tamil Tigers, have waged since the early 1980s notwithstanding, the fact remains that one major reason for the long conflict has been the Tamils' sense of deprivation at the hands of the majority Sinhala. Prabhakaran's demand for a separate Tamil state was based on the notion that the Sri Lankan establishment would persist in pursuing the policy of discrimination against Tamils that had been set in motion in the 1950s. It will now be Rajapakse's task, therefore, to ensure the removal of such feelings through meeting the genuine demands of the Tamils. That will mean according to Tamils equality with the Sinhala in every sphere of political and social activity in order for the former to identify with the rest of the country. One cannot ignore the rather justifiable bitterness Sri Lanka's Tamils have felt about their place in the country's scheme of things. Such bitterness can only be wiped off through guaranteeing Tamil rights --- to education, to government service, to pursuing their own language and culture --- in the country's constitution.

The immediate need is for quick action on the resettlement of the tens of thousands of civilians left in a state of destitution by the armed conflict in Tamil-dominated regions. Thousands have perished over the past few weeks and allegations have already surfaced about the brutal treatment of Tamil non-combatants by the military. Indeed, governments and agencies abroad have drawn attention to human rights violations by the authorities in the regained territories. The government must act swiftly, therefore, to allay international concerns. This can be done through effective cooperation with governments and bodies willing to bail Sri Lanka out of the massive humanitarian quagmire the war has placed it in. Rehabilitation of the displaced civilians through provision of relief to them is of the essence.

The larger goal, now that the Sri Lankan military has brought the LTTE insurrection to an end, is for reconciliation. It falls to the government to ensure the security of life and property of all Tamils through protecting them from the more rabid among the majority Sinhala community. Any humiliation or brutalisation of the Tamils can only keep an aperture open for fresh conflict between the two communities in the future.

Private sector universities

A comprehensive, need-oriented law imperative

THE policy approach successive governments have taken to private sector universities in the country has been marked either by lack of inclusiveness as far as the viewpoints of stakeholders went, or by short-sighted formulation that failed to legislate for the future.

Thus, we see while private universities came into operation under the Private University Act 1992, not even half a decade onwards, the government was to feel the need to amend it in 1998. Down the road, there has been intermittent categorisation of universities in terms of their quality and performance with an attempted blacklisting of the substandard ones which didn't quite work for lack of enforcement. Then, responding to a proposal from the UGC, the last caretaker government promulgated the Private University Ordinance, 2008. The present government deciding not to ratify the ordinance, has let it lapse.

There we stand now face to face with the challenge of updating the law in a way that while meeting the inadequacies of the provisions of the past goes forward to facilitate higher education chiming in with the vision for a modern Bangladesh. In this perspective, we have the news that a new private university act is in the works. The UGC has been tasked by the government to organise an interactive session of stake-holders to ascertain their views on what should go into the proposed law and take these onboard in order to promote and streamline higher education in the private sector. There is little denying that given the limited intake capacity of public universities, private universities by and large are providing alternatives for multitudes of youngsters to be absorbed in them. It is equally true that barring a handful of universities, a dozen or so top ranking ones, most others need to be improved while there are a large many that are patently substandard, mere signboard organisations, some of which even selling certificates. Furthermore, there is a genuine parental concern over high fees charged by the universities and a bend towards commercialisation, an issue that will have to be addressed in tandem with considerations of quality and outreach to the middle class.

The exchange-of-view meet should not be one-off but a continuing process of consultation until such time as sufficient input is available for formulation of a comprehensive policy on private universities.

Forget 1971, says Pakistan

Roedad Khan, that incorrigible Pakistani bureaucrat, glowed at dawn on March 26, 1971. As Bengalis were shot down, he exclaimed: "Yaar, iman taaza ho gya." Pakistan must someday weep for that comment. And then we will forget.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

PAKISTAN has asked us to let bygones be bygones, to forget 1971. Now, that is indeed a queer proposition to make before a nation that Pakistan's soldiers so happily and brutally went into the job of murdering, raping and maiming over nine months of medieval barbarism. But, of course, we are ready to forget and forgive, ready to turn a new page if only Pakistan's government and its people would do their bit in helping us forget that sordid past. The trouble is their attitude has not helped all these years since the end of Pakistan and the rise of Bangladesh. It is always attitude that matters.

And how it matters was demonstrated beautifully and poignantly by Willy Brandt, that man of peace, when he went and knelt before Israel's Yad Vashem memorial in 1970 as a mark of penance for what Nazi Germany did to six million Jews in the Hitler years.

The German chancellor could well have declined to do that, seeing that he himself had run from the Nazis, that his politics had nothing in common with that of Hitler and his brutal regime. But, then again, Brandt knew that the road to the future would stay blocked until the past had adequately been tackled.

It is a lesson Pakistan and its leaders need to learn from. To be sure, Pakistanis will tell you in their turn that Pervez Musharraf once expressed his regret over any crimes that may have been committed in Bangladesh in 1971. When they do that, you might as well inform them that there is

a huge difference between an expression of regret and a clear statement of apology.

When you regret something you have done, you are not exactly contrite over your action. But when you publicly let people know that you are apologetic over a crime or sin you have committed, you give out the good feeling that you have finally been able to catch up with history. More significantly, you have finally adopted the thought that in life morality matters than anything else.

Pakistan's people and its leaders have, to our clear displeasure, never tried to take the high moral ground when it comes to dealing with 1971. The history that is taught in schools is a travesty of the truth. While a detailed analysis is provided of the circumstances leading to the creation of Pakistan in 1947, nothing really is offered as an explanation for the disappearance of East Pakistan in 1971. Or if there is something of an explanation, the clear hint is there that a conspiracy, obviously by non-Pakistanis, broke the country into two. With that kind of approach to history, you only undermine history. An angry Zulfikar Ali Bhutto visited the National Memorial in Savar in June 1974 and made it clear he saw nothing wrong in what his country had done to Bengalis in 1971.

You would have expected a different kind of response from Bhutto, for he was an educated man and comfortable in the ways of the world. Yes, he did have a big hand in the genocide, but he could have redeemed himself if he had, on that trip, apologised in unambiguous terms to the Bengalis. He did not and neither did any of his successors. His daughter Benazir, a student at Harvard



The people want an apology.

in 1971, scrupulously refused to believe the reports of the killings carried by the western media at the time.

All that mattered was what her father told her in his letters. And she believed him. To the end of her life, you might reasonably conclude, she thought the Bangladesh crisis was not brought on by the army or her father but by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his Awami League.

Naturally, therefore, you do not expect anything but professions of regret from Pakistan about the atrocities of its army in Bangladesh. Or there is the quixotic too. When Ziaul Haq travelled to Dhaka in 1985, he did a good thing of visiting the memorial at Savar. It was one opportunity he could have used to say sorry on behalf of his country. He did not do that. Instead, he told bemused Bengali journalists: "Your heroes are our heroes." So why then did his army go about picking off our freedom fighters and our innocent citizens? Imagine the Japanese telling the

Chinese: "The people we massacred in Nanjing in 1937 were our brothers."

We will forget 1971 when Pakistan makes a move to remember it. That remembering ought not to be like Pervez Musharraf's. In his memoirs, the former military ruler notes that he and his fellow soldiers in Rawalpindi wept on the day the Pakistan army surrendered in Bangladesh. That weeping came a little late in the day and for the wrong reasons. For nine months the Pakistanis made Bengalis weep. And then it was their turn to cry, not because they had brutalised Bangladesh but because they had lost East Pakistan.

Roedad Khan, that incorrigible Pakistani bureaucrat, glowed at dawn on March 26, 1971. As Bengalis were shot down, he exclaimed: "Yaar, iman taaza ho gya." Pakistan must someday weep for that comment. And then we will forget.

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What now in India?

India realises that it cannot achieve its due role in the region and globally without American cooperation. Only its improved power can restrain Pakistan's adventurism and contain China's increasing influence in the region.

HARUN UR RASHID

POLLING results indicate that Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh will become only the second Indian leader to win re-election after serving a full five-year term. Even though the election was fought primarily on domestic issues, the result has enormous implications for our region.

India's new-found foreign policy direction is built on the back of a booming economy. GDP more than tripled since 1998. Despite global woes, India will grow at an impressive 6% to 7% this year.

When Dr. Singh became prime minister in 2004, New Delhi saw that a relationship with America was filled with opportunity rather than just threat. Not because they are natural allies, but because strategic interests coincided reinforced by oil diplomacy, the war on terrorism and the presence of more than a million Indians in the US.

India realises that it cannot achieve its due role in the region and globally without American cooperation. Only its improved power can restrain Pakistan's adventurism and contain China's increasing influence in the region. Former prime minister

Inder Kumar Gujral said that normal relations with America were regarded as a momentous breakthrough.

India, however, does not want others to see the relations with the US as a sacrifice of its option of policies. Rather, it considers the relationship as a partnership to achieve a dominant role in the region and globally. India, being a large country with resources, does not consider co-operation with America as subservience.

The signing of a nuclear agreement with the US has been a landmark decision by the Congress-led government. According to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, India's defence ministry has earmarked \$ 2 billion annually to build 300 to 400 weapons over the next 5 to 7 years. The US has openly discussed the sale of naval vessels, combat aircraft, patrol aircraft and helicopters to India.

India's relations with Russia continue robustly. India has begun constructing a 37,500-tonne aircraft carrier that will fly MiG-29 fighters, joining the navies of big powers in such capabilities. It also plans to lease two nuclear submarines from Russia.

India has consolidated its economic relations with China. Bilateral trade was

boosted from \$18.7 billion in 2005 to \$20 billion by 2008. India seeks to be a major player in computer software and bioinformatics in the same way that China is in the area of hardware. The future of business, according to some analysts, will be shaped between Bangalore and Shanghai.

India is strategically located in the middle of South Asia and the ocean that hugs it, the Indian Ocean, reaches out to the sands of Egypt to the Straits of Malacca.

Surrounded by unstable states Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Myanmar India stands as a beacon of democratic stability. India's rising economic power and political stability is likely to shift the geographic distribution of global power in Asia and force a restructuring of western-dominated international bodies, right up to the UN.

The democratic government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is well poised to have meaningful and constructive relations with the newly elected Congress-led government. India appears to be more comfortable with the non-communal policy of the Awami League. Sheikh Hasina's landslide victory in the December election demonstrates that people voted for "bread and butter" issues and rejected the ideology of Islamic-based parties (as Indonesia did last April).

It is highly desirable that India should pursue the "Gujral doctrine" (not based on strict reciprocity) in its relations with Bangladesh to create an environment of trust and confidence so that the percep-

tion of India as being an arrogant "big brother" disappears.

The outstanding issues with Bangladesh need to be resolved through meaningful dialogue. In the past, India sought to negotiate a single issue on a bilateral basis, without appreciating that it was connected with other issues and therefore did not admit an easy solution.

An integrated approach to all bilateral issues is imperative, rather than addressing issues piecemeal or sector-wise. Furthermore, India needs to view the issues of energy, water resources, transit and global warming through the prism of regional cooperation.

Bangladesh wants to establish mutually beneficial relations with India and if India is able to create a suitable environment by resolving prickly bilateral issues, it will be much easier for the Sheikh Hasina government to carry the people in developing a range of political and economic relationship with India.

Both countries need to make the same political, bureaucratic, intellectual, educational, cultural and media efforts to focus on each other's positive features. Often, some sections in the media in both countries highlight negative images of each other.

Given the right spirit and the desire to live together in cooperation, there is no reason why relations between the two countries cannot be friendly.

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Equality of right in education

Undeniably, however, the increase of educational institutions in the private sector is more than justified and one should, thus, promote burgeoning of the same so that more and more students can avail themselves of the education they want.

KAZI S.M. KHASRUL ALAM QUDDUSI

WITH the mushrooming of highly expensive private educational institutions in our country, ranging from kindergartens to universities, it is imperative to bring a semblance of equilibrium in our education sector.

Every year, ninety percent of higher secondary passed students cannot get enrolled in public universities due to scarcity of seats, and the scenario is almost the same in the lower levels as well. Undeniably, however, the increase of educational institutions in the private sector is more than justified and one should, thus, promote burgeoning of the same so that more and more students can avail themselves of the education they want.

Admittedly, a good number of private universities have already made their mark in imparting quality education in Bangladesh. Such a rating can also be used

in relation to privately owned colleges and schools. However, the crux of the problem is the charge they are imposing in exchange for the education.

It is understandable that it is not possible for private institutions to provide education for the same fees as public institutions. However, for example, charging Tk.5000 or more for a student is unimaginable, whereas in public schools the students pay far less.

Some may argue that the quality of education the students are getting almost free in public schools and colleges cannot be compared to that imparted in highly-expensive private schools and colleges. Though, the preceding observation may apply only partially, there is a counter school of thought as well, which claims that the products of private educational institutions are markedly uncomfortable in various public examinations.

Though only a few private educational

institutions are providing real quality education, the complaint of low quality of education in many public educational institutions is not at all unfounded. For this, however, many factors are responsible, which include low salary of teachers and resultant private tuition by school and college teachers; lack of quality training; lack of interest in the talented ones to join those institutions due to financial constraints, and so on.

Though the finance minister has shown a silver lining in terms of betterment of salary and other facilities for teachers of all levels through forming a separate pay commission, the government will have to put a premium on rigorous training as well, by which, I think, even mediocre teachers could become capable of imparting quality education. The complaint about shortage of good English and mathematics teachers makes it all the more pressing.

Admittedly, many private educational institutions boast of quality English education. Though their claim is debatable in many cases, the government, I think, should critically rethink its strategy in terms of language education. It is public knowledge that many job seekers find things really difficult in the highly competitive job market at home and abroad due to lack of knowledge of English.

Needless to say, due emphasis on functional foreign language skill development can easily increase remittances from abroad as well. Though global recession is a discouraging factor for the government to go for any pay hike, the government's initiative is highly appreciable.

In fact, investment in education cannot be judged by an immediate cost-benefit analysis. Interestingly enough, South Korea, to cite one prime example, has continued to increase investment in education despite intense pressure of global recession.

The bottom line is that the high cost of education in private educational institutions is not only keeping education in those institutions out of reach for the middle-income people it is also deepening the financial and social divide further, which is doing no good to the social fabric.

It is high time the state played an interventionist role here. Meanwhile, the entrepreneurs who have taken the private education sector more as a business than a social activity should also do a serious rethinking in terms of their social responsibility.

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