

GROUND REALITIES

Lahore 1940 ... Dhaka 1971

FS's tirade against the Star

Top diplomat's not so diplomatic words

OUR foreign secretary, known for his refined taste for works of art, poetry, literature etc. took an uncharacteristic and extremely uncharitable swipe at this newspaper for its editorial of March 20 titled "Repatriation hampered", subtitled "Let our government do more to help". Starting his press briefing by singling out the Star's diplomatic correspondent and subjecting him to some personal remarks, he termed the editorial as an example of "sad journalism", "bad journalism" journalism meant to "discredit the government" and damage the "image of the country", as an example of "not so healthy mind". He also castigated its editor for "not saying sorry to him" by 5.30 pm (time of the briefing) even though he had called him earlier. He questioned how could an editor not know what an editorial contained (we have no idea why he said so) and said this was not "professional" (of course it is not).

We are obviously shocked, and wonder what could have provoked an otherwise pleasant and soft-spoken diplomat to speak as such. The normal procedure is to send a "clarification", "rejoinder" or even a "protest" to the paper and wait to see what action the paper takes. The foreign ministry did send a "rejoinder" which we carry it (elsewhere) today, as we carry the one from IOM, both with our replies. So what was need for that "on the record" tirade when a rejoinder was being sent.

From the FS's remarks one would get the impression that the editorial was the only thing we wrote on the Libyan affair. In fact we have written six editorials to date. In these editorials we have mentioned the various actions being taken, and not taken, by the government, praising it for some of its actions. We are perhaps the only newspaper that has sent a reporter to the Tunisian-Libyan border for eye-witness reports. In addition we cover the daily briefing of the foreign ministry, making for large number of stories, articles and opinions on the subject.

In the background of all that we have written, to single out one editorial critical of the government only so far as speed and volume of repatriation from the Tunian-Libyan border is concerned is highly exaggerated, to put it most mildly.

The whole episode- using a common briefing to single out one paper, to call it names, question its professionalism, make it appear as if we are working against our national interest, and insist that he was saying everything "on record" - is, to us, indicative of a narrowing mindset.

Welcome return from captivity

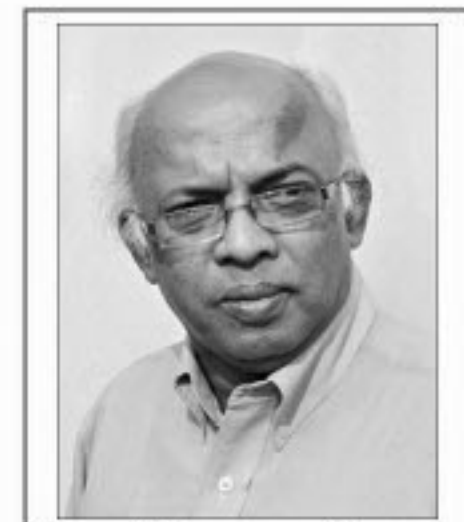
Globaleffort to contain piracy imperative

WE express our joy and relief to have our sailors and crew back home. We sympathise with the victims who went through an agonizing captivity for 100 days, much to the concern of their near and dear ones let alone compatriots.

We express our concern over state of security in the high seas. Our MV Jahan Moni was hijacked on December 5, 2010 from a place in Arabian Sea some 170 nautical miles from Laksha islands of India. After a long saga of negotiation with the Somali captors, the crew were released on March 14. Today piracy poses a real threat to the very growth of trade and commerce by waterways and the shipping industry.

According to the UN, last year the shipping industry incurred a loss of 238 million dollars and the global economy about five to seven billion through piracy at seas. The entire area in the Indian Ocean particularly around the Horn of Africa has become a cause for concern for the ocean going vessels. Somali pirates now rule over more than one million square miles preying on whoever dares to run into their zone. Although pressure mounts on the Somali government to take measures against the pirates, it has not taken any effective step as yet. On the contrary, many Somali lawmakers support the outlaws terming them as 'heroes'. Somali pirates are having heyday using captured ships as their base in the deep waters. Still, some thirty ships remain under their siege.

It's high time the governments and international organizations make coordinated efforts to ensure safety of marine waterways. International waters can be guarded by naval ships at vulnerable points, high-sea patrolling with sophisticated weaponry should be increased, and escort vessels need to be provided in a package of new arrangements worked out by International Maritime Bureau in close consultation with



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THE All India Muslim League, on March 23, 1940, officially expressed the view at its session in Lahore that India comprised two

nations, Hindus and Muslims, and that these two "nations" could not be part of the same country, could not inter-dine, could not intermarry.

That was the precise feeling of Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the very westernised lawyer who by 1940 had reinvented himself as a champion of the Muslims of the subcontinent and from that vantage point had drawn the conclusion that India, in the interest of its two distinct "nations," needed to go through geographical and political vivisection.

It was thus that a so-called two-nation theory came to pass. Muslims in the west and north-west as well as the east of India, it was put across in so much sophistry, were entitled to their independent states, which states would go by the name "Pakistan." The Pakistan resolution, for so it came to be known, made the point that independent states, to the east and to the west, would be set up for the Muslims of India. The rest of the country, in the centre, would belong to the Hindu "nation" as Jinnah would have it.

For the future founder of Pakistan, there did not seem to be any place for India to exist any more. He had in mind Pakistan and Hindustan, which was his way of suggesting that if there were to be a Muslim state, there naturally would be the other side of the coin in the form of a Hindu state. He ignored or dismissed the notion that unlike Pakistan, India was set on a path of secular nationhood. In his remarks on the eve of Partition in 1947, Jinnah wished Hindustan well. He pointedly held himself aloof from any mention of India. Bigotry was in the ascendant.

The Pakistan Resolution has since its formulation and adoption been a subject of controversy for the people of the subcontinent. For one thing, the validity of the argument of Muslims being a nation has never

devastating for Pakistan down the years.

There is an irony one cannot miss. Thirty one years to the day when the Muslim League adopted the Pakistan

followed in separate vehicles in like manner. The national flag of Pakistan, a symbol of Lahore 1940, stayed atop, in forlorn manner, on the President's House and in the cantonment.

There was a bigger irony at work in March 1971. And it was a clear repudiation of Jinnah's supposition, his belief, that the Hindu and Muslim religious communities were two nations, that they could not share the same land and admire the same landscape. Where the Bengalis had in 1947 gone along with the spurious notion that they were part of a communal nation, by 1971 they had arrived at the belief that their future would be in jeopardy if secular politics did not become the foundation of their societal ethos. In March 1971, communal Pakistan was jettisoned in favour of a secular Bangladesh.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman did the precise reverse of what Jinnah had done in the 1940s. Where a secular, enlightened Jinnah swiftly dwindled into a communal being through his propagation of the two-nation theory, a previously communally driven Mujib demonstrated, all the way from the Six Points to the critical moments of March 1971, that he had risen above the fanaticism of faith to embrace the secular and therefore the enlightening, Jinnah, never a great man, dwindled even more in 1971. Mujib, consistently uncompromising, became larger than life.

Note the final irony. It was in Lahore that the seeds of a Muslim Pakistan were sown by the Muslim League in 1940. It was, again, in Lahore that the sapling of a secular Bangladesh was planted, in the shape of the Six Points, by the Awami League in 1966. And those Bangladesh flags that fluttered over Bengali homes on March 23, 1971 were symbolic -- of a necessary, inevitable correction of a historical blunder.

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been proved, for obvious historical and logical reasons.

For another, by 1946 Mohammad Ali Jinnah and his Muslim League stood guilty of manipulating the resolution through carefully expunging the term "states" from it and replacing it with "state." It was later given out, in pretty unconvincing manner, that "states" in the original resolution had been a typing error. And it took six years for the Muslim League to notice the error and correct it? The truth was anything but. The suspicion has lingered that it was Jinnah who, through a misuse of his vast powers, arbitrarily had "states" mutate into "state." The consequences would be

Resolution in Lahore, the very people who had sealed the establishment of the state of Pakistan in 1947 through being the majority of Muslims in the subcontinent cheerily went about repudiating it. Atop every home and every office in Dhaka on March 23, 1971, Bengalis hoisted the red and green flag of the independent state they meant to create in place of what was then a dying East Pakistan.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in his youth a vocal exponent of Pakistan, motored down the streets of the city to the President's House for deliberations that would have a bearing on the future of Pakistan. A Bangladesh flag fluttered on his car. His advisers

Russia, Iran, and the reset

MARK N. KATZ

IN addition to improving cooperation on other issues, one of the goals of the Obama administration's effort to "reset" Russian-American relations was to obtain greater help from Moscow with regard to the Iranian nuclear issue. In 2010, it appeared that this policy was highly successful. In June 2010, Russia joined with the U.S. and most other members of the UN Security Council in imposing increased sanctions on Iran for its continued non-cooperation on the nuclear issue. And in September 2010, Russian President Medvedev announced that Moscow would not be shipping the S-300 air defense missile systems to Tehran that it had earlier agreed to do.

So far in 2011, though, Moscow has been backpedaling on Iran. President Medvedev has reverted to the earlier Russian line that there is no proof that Tehran seeks to acquire nuclear weapons. Foreign Minister Lavrov has made clear -- repeatedly -- that Moscow not only does not support further sanctions against Iran, but thinks that the time has come to ease them.

What could explain this change in Russian behaviour? Two developments in particular may have contributed to this. The first was the 2010 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (known as "New START"). For Moscow, the New START treaty was an especially high priority. With Russia not modernising its nuclear weapons arsenal at the same rate that America has been doing, Moscow was desperate to get the U.S. to agree to the limits imposed by New START since it would be difficult for it to match the American strategic nuclear arsenal if Washington did not.

But while Presidents Obama and Medvedev signed this treaty on April 8, 2010, the U.S. Senate's ratification of it was very much in doubt due to Republican concerns about Russia.

Russian cooperation with the U.S. on imposing additional UNSC sanctions against Iran in June and Moscow announcing in September that it would not ship S-300s to Tehran may well have been motivated to some degree by a Russian desire to allay these Republican concerns. But once the Senate ratified New START on December 22, 2010, Moscow's incentive to appease the Republican minority there declined -- at least for now.

The second factor has been the democratic uprisings that have shaken the Middle East since the start of 2011. Moscow did not seem to be

Eastern countries (including Yemen, Oman, and Bahrain). In mid-2009, when the Green Movement burst forth in Iran to protest the widely disbelieved announcement that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had won re-election as president on the first ballot by an overwhelming majority, Moscow immediately congratulated Ahmadinejad on being elected to a second term. Moscow had no desire to see a democratic revolution succeed in Iran then -- or now.

What accounts for Moscow's more sanguine view of democratic revolution in Tunisia and Egypt but opposition to it in Libya and Iran? This may be due to how Moscow views the differing geopolitical impacts of change in these countries on Russia. The authoritarian regimes that were ousted in Tunisia and Egypt had been closely allied to the U.S.

If the new governments in these countries remain closely allied to the U.S., there will be no geopolitical change. But if they move away from it, there may be an opportunity for Russia to gain some influence -- or at least some more business -- over them. Libya, though, is a different story. While Qaddafi's relations with the U.S. have improved since 2003, Russia has had much better relations with him than Washington has. A democratic revolution in Libya, then, threatens to increase American and decrease Russian influence in Libya.

Russian analysts have long worried that an Iranian-American rapprochement could result not only in Western firms crowding out Russian ones in Iran, but Washington working with Tehran to provide an alternative to Russia as an export route for Caspian Basin oil and gas. A democratic revolution in Iran, then, could have -- in Moscow's view -- profoundly negative geopolitical consequences for Russia and positive ones for America. This being the case, it is not surprising that

the Putin/Medvedev leadership wants to strengthen the Khamenei/Ahmadinejad regime in Iran, and not weaken it through imposing additional sanctions -- especially since Moscow views these democratic uprisings as being inspired, or even orchestrated, by Washington.

We cannot, of course, be completely positive that the U.S. Senate's December 2010 ratification of New START as well as the 2011 democratic uprisings in the Muslim Middle East are what caused the Kremlin to back off from its previous support for the Obama administration's policy toward Iran over the nuclear issue. Nor does Moscow's backing off from supporting the Obama administration on the Iranian nuclear issue in 2011 mean that it won't be more supportive in future.

The New START experience suggests that if Senate ratification is needed for something else that Moscow values, it might become more supportive once again. Further, if the democratic uprisings are crushed, spread no further, or bypass Iran, Moscow may once again become more comfortable with joining Washington in pressing Tehran on the nuclear issue.

But whatever the explanation for Moscow backtracking on its support for sanctions against Iran, one thing is clear: the Kremlin was not persuaded by American and European arguments about the urgency of the Iranian nuclear issue or of any necessity to continue imposing sanctions against Tehran in order to deal with it. In terms of the Iranian nuclear issue, the Obama administration's hopes for the reset have not been realized -- nor are they likely to be so.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 23

1848

The ship John Wickliffe arrives at Port Chalmers carrying the first Scottish settlers for Dunedin, New Zealand. Otago province is founded.

1903

The Wright Brothers apply for a patent on their invention of one of the first successful airplanes.

1919

In Milan, Italy, Benito Mussolini founds his Fascist political movement.

1931

Bhagat Singh, Shivaram Rajguru and Sukhdev Thapar are hanged for killing a police officer to avenge the death of Lala Lajpat Rai.

1933

The Reichstag passes the Enabling act of 1933, making Adolf Hitler dictator of Germany.

1940

The Lahore Resolution put forward at the Annual General Convention of the All India Muslim League.

1942

World War II : In the Indian Ocean, Japanese forces capture the Andaman Islands.

1956

Pakistan becomes the first Islamic republic in the world. (Republic Day in Pakistan).