

## Once again, violence claims a life

Parties must discipline their young

THE death of a Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activist Sajib, following a violent clash with his rivals at Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology is a reflection yet once again of the state of heightened tension within the ruling party student wing. The manner in which the BCL has been indulging in feuding and factional violence with a growing sense of impunity can be attributed to the ruling party turning a blind eye to the internecine conflict in its student wing and leaving it to its own devices. Although the prime minister has from time to time exhorted BCL leaderships to behave, when it came to dealing with criminality the government has been found wanting.

It is time that serious efforts were expended in rolling back the tide of violence within the student community, particularly that of the BCL, which not only disturbs campus peace but also severely undermines government's credibility. Not long ago, another young man lost his life as a result of a severe assault by his rivals on the campus. Efforts are surely expected of the law enforcers, whose responsibility in such situations is to step into the scene every time there is violence or intimations of it. All too often, the picture has been one of the police being silent spectators until actual violence has taken place.

By far the bigger responsibility of keeping violent young people on a leash is that of the political party. It is imperative for the ruling party to pull up the organization across the board and send out the strong message that it means to be firm with its young followers as well as with anyone else who makes a mockery of the law. The ruling party cannot afford to squander its present and its future through the hooliganism of the young.

Meanwhile, let the police get into action and see to it that those who took Sajib's promising life are swiftly apprehended and punished. Only that can restore normality and make it possible for a reopening of Ruet at the earliest.

## Congrats to our national cricket team

Build on this success

THE whole country was caught in a state of euphoria on Friday night when the Bangladesh cricket team clinched a five-wicket spectacular win over India. Beating the world as well as the Asia Cup champions, that too, by chasing a formidable target of 290 was indeed a feat that should bolster the morale of our young side. We felicitate all members of the national team, Bangladesh Cricket Board and the coach who made the victory possible.

Previous track records in the ODIs speak of the occasional feats of the tigers in humbling cricketing giants such as Australia, Pakistan, England and India in other encounters. But for the most part, their performance records have been highly inconsistent as they often dropped off from the sublime to the ridicule. Even in the current series, it's a pity that they lost to Pakistan by 21 runs although they had the game well into their grip.

Does this inconsistency not point to some basic problems that the Bangladesh cricket organizers are saddled with? Does it not imply a flaw related to the players' sustained training through exposure to first class cricket competitions within the country? Although some are attributing Friday's success to the recently concluded BPL which brought together a number of high performing cricketers, we believe that with proper training and motivation our national team can live up to the expectation of the cricketing world. We would stress that more and more high profile cricketing competitions be arranged within the country. We think with proper talent hunting we can bring to training camps a number of young aspirants for competitive cricket.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 18

1241

Mongols overwhelm Polish armies in Krakow in the Battle of Chmielnik and plunder the city.

1922

In India, Mohandas Gandhi is sentenced to six years in prison for civil disobedience. He would serve only 2 years.

1948

Soviet consultants leave Yugoslavia in the first sign of a Tito-Stalin split.

1962

The Evian Accords put an end to the Algerian War of Independence, which began in 1954.

1974

Oil embargo crisis: Most OPEC nations end a five-month oil embargo against the United States, Europe and Japan.

1992

White South Africans vote overwhelmingly in favour, in a national referendum, to end the racist policy of Apartheid.

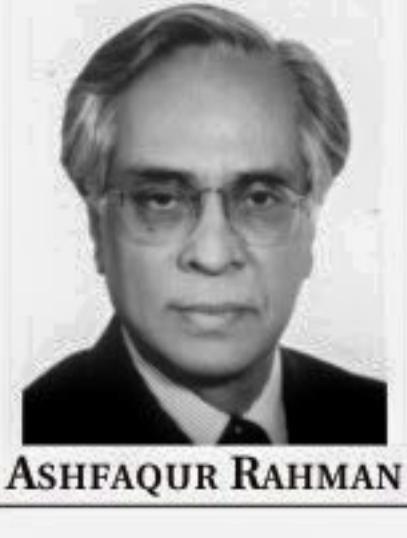
1994

Bosnia's Bosniaks and Croats sign the Washington Agreement, ending warring between the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia and the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and establishing the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

2003

In the House of Commons, British MPs vote in favour of military intervention in Iraq by 412 votes to 149.

# The maritime award



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

LAST week, Bangladesh received one of the best news in many decades. The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) located in Hamburg, Germany, gave its judgment on the dispute with Myanmar on the delimitation of our maritime boundary. It awarded us what we bargained for and more. It was indeed a great victory for Bangladesh. The credit goes particularly to this government, which initiated the move to seek international arbitration to resolve the dispute. The credit also goes to a select few in our Ministry of Foreign Affairs who used their professionalism to pursue the case with single-minded dedication and a sensible strategy.

In the landmark judgment, ITLOS awarded Bangladesh a 200 miles exclusive zone following the concave nature of our coast in the Bay of Bengal, with full territorial and economic rights. It also gave us a substantial share of the outer continental shelf beyond 200 miles. The Tribunal also awarded a full 12 mile territorial sea (TS) around St Martins Island in Cox's Bazaar district, trashing Myanmar's assertion that Bangladesh should get only 6 miles of the territorial sea there.

The Tribunal based this historic ruling on the principle of equity which Bangladesh had been fighting for in the last 38 years, rather than on the principle of equidistance. ITLOS took note of the configuration of our coast, its length, the large population of our country, the nature of dependency of the people as well as our Gross National Product among other factors. Myanmar had, however, argued that the maritime boundary should be drawn simply on the principle of geometric equidistance from their coast.

If this was to happen, then the maritime boundary so determined would have cut directly into Bangladesh's coastline and truncated its maritime jurisdiction. With India

also arguing in favour of the principle of equidistance to our west, we would have got a 130 mile wide outlet to navigate to the high sea. We would also be denied our right to the living and the non-living resources in this huge swathe of maritime territory. Indeed, hostile powers could have locked Bangladesh in this virtual lagoon so created, circumscribing our movement from the close confines of our coast.

The 151 page judgment was passed with 21 judges voting in favour with only one judge differing. The decision given is now final and there is no appeal.

By this award, we have got 111,000 square kilometers area in the Bay of Bengal (almost the same size of

A five member arbitral tribunal (three members from the ITLOS who have already ruled in our favour and one ad-hoc member each from Bangladesh and India) will sit in the Hague to decide on the issue. They will give their ruling by 2014.

The settlement with Myanmar, based on the principle of equity may now discourage India from insisting on the principle of equidistance. But we would have to wait and see. India may in the meantime proffer other arguments to get round this established principle in the Bay of Bengal. But we could be hopeful for a decision in our favour.

The long run implication of the ITLOS award may be somewhat heart warming for the people of

***Let us not forget that Bangladesh is only one of the many littoral states along the Bay of Bengal. We must therefore cooperate with the other states and try to jointly develop the resources in the Bay.***

Bangladesh) with all the resources there and whatever resources we may discover in that area in the future.

The award has many short, medium and long term implications for Bangladesh. In the short term, we can now start to drill again for oil and gas in our 200 mile economic zone, as the area is no more disputed. We can start to allocate blocks to international companies for exploration. We also now have exclusive right over the fish resources and other marine life in this area. We can begin to scientifically exploit them for benefit of our people. Safe passage for ships from all over the world is now guaranteed.

In the medium term, among other things, it could have an effect on the maritime dispute we still have with India. India has been insisting, like Myanmar, on the principle of equidistance instead of equity in demarcating the maritime border with us. Since we have not been able to resolve the matter amicably we have invoked "Annex VII" under Article 3 of the dispute resolution clause of the 1982 UN Convention of the Law of the Sea.

In the long term, among other things, it could have an effect on the maritime dispute we still have with India. India has been insisting, like

Bangladesh. As technology improves and cost reduces, we could be in a position to harness alternative energy from the sea waves and from the sea wind on a massive scale. This will definitely add to our repertoire of the available sources of energy. We would also be able to mine the sea bed in our economic zone for valuable minerals. We would be able to farm the sea too for marine life and harvest it for our growing population. A whole new generation of Bangladeshis can now grow up consuming the rich proteins that can be sourced from the sea. In future, our people would not remain mal-nourished as they are at present.

But what do we require to do now to protect and promote the huge resource that has been made available to us because of this award?

Our navy needs to be upgraded and modernised post haste. We cannot allow international poachers to come into our exclusive economic zone and steal our fish and marine life. We also cannot allow international pirates to roost here. A quick and cheap way to boost our navy is to acquire subma-

ries to protect our sea lanes and our sea resources. Naval platforms where sea planes and helicopters can operate from must be acquired. We also need detailed survey of the Bay. For this we should procure a multi-purpose survey vessel.

Next, we must open marine research institutes in Bangladesh. They will not only be able to find and analyse new and unknown species of plants and marine life, but will also help their cultivation and harvesting. Our universities should open marine studies and train persons who will be knowledgeable and skilled in these areas. Intensive research programmes must be introduced in our higher seats of learning.

Last but not the least, we may consider setting up a Bay of Bengal maritime commission under the aegis of the Ministry of Defense to provide our government policy options to protect and promote our maritime resources. It would primarily introduce the best practices prevailing in various maritime countries and regulate the exploitation of the resources. The commission would have experts and policy planners and help to convert our economic zone into a resource bowl for Bangladesh.

Let us not forget that Bangladesh is only one of the many littoral states along the Bay of Bengal. We must therefore cooperate with the other states and try to jointly develop the resources in the Bay.

A wise man had once said: "Wrinkles should merely indicate where smiles have been." Till last week Bangladesh had great worries over the Bay of Bengal. We still have anxiety over what the result will be of the arbitration on the maritime boundary with India.

But this week, the clouds circling over our dispute with Myanmar have faded. The Bay now holds promise for us. Let us therefore recall the past when the Bay had fed us and eased our travels. Let us now think what more it can give us in the future. Let the wrinkles now disappear and the smiles again appear.

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# China-US free trade talks suggested

DING QINGFEN, ZHANG YUWEI and CHEN WEIHUA

CHINA should propose the initiation of talks on a free trade agreement (FTA) with the United States to reduce trade frictions and create benefits for both, a former senior commerce official has said. "Why shouldn't we consider establishing an FTA between the world's two largest economies?" asked Wei Jianguo, former deputy minister of commerce. "We could study the feasibility of the matter," Wei said, adding that China and the US have highly complementary economies.

China should also "accelerate its steps" on establishing an FTA with Japan and South Korea, Wei said, which would connect the three top economies in Asia.

Wei's proposals come as the US is aggressively expanding its influence in the Asia-Pacific region and expects to grow its economy and create employment by taking advantage of the fast economic growth in Asia.

The world's largest economy is advancing a trade agreement in Asia, known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, to remove trade and investment barriers among the nations involved. Nine countries, including Australia and Vietnam, have agreed to join the pact and set a goal of reaching a final agreement by the end of this year. China is not included.

Last year, Japan, the world's third-largest economy, also announced its

desire to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership talks, but the matter is pending. China is trying to transform from a big exporter to a great consumer, while the US pledges to double its exports in five years.

Asia, including China, is a major destination for promoting American goods. "The China-US FTA could help the US expand exports to China, reducing trade frictions," Wei said.

US experts said an FTA between China and the US should be a good thing.

"Any approach by

China to initiate

discussions with the

US on a free trade

agreement should be

welcome," said

Vikram Nehru, senior

associate of

Southeast Asian

Studies at the

Carnegie Endowment

for International

Peace, a Washington-

based think tank. But

he stressed that

"China should be aware that US

concerns extend well beyond trade

barriers and are likely to include

'behind-the-border' trade issues."

These trade issues could involve

explicit budgetary subsidies and

implicit policy-related subsidies to

state enterprises. Regulations that

shield state enterprises from compe-

tition in domestic markets, such as restrictions on government procurement and barriers that inhibit new firms from entering key manufacturing and services sectors, could also be a problem, Nehru claimed.

The protection of intellectual property rights of US companies by the Chinese legal system is also a big concern, Nehru said.

"I think the time has come for a new and bolder approach," Maurice Greenberg, former chief of AIG and now chairman and CEO of C.V. Starr and Co, said in an article in the Wall Street Journal in January.

"China and the US should open negotiations for a free trade agreement between our two countries," he said.

"The negotiations will not be easy. There will be numerous impasses, and the negotiations will

probably last for many years. But discussing problems in the context of driving toward a potential agreement is far better than lengthy dialogues without an end result," Greenberg said.

"Even if we fail to reach an agreement on many issues, progress should be possible on some issues,

and that will create a better trade climate. The alternative is that we drift along constantly irritating each other in a low-grade trade war that will leave businesses and consumers in both countries losers."

Many are worried about a trade war between the world's top two economies as the US recently announced the establishment of an interagency trade-enforcement unit to investigate whether nations, including China, play by trade rules.

The US House of Representatives recently passed a bill allowing the US Commerce Department to continue to charge countervailing duties worth \$5 billion on imports from China.

But a China-US FTA may not be established soon. "In the short term, talks on a China-US FTA are highly unlikely," said Zhang Yunling, director of the Division of International Studies under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The US is strongly committed to advancing the Trans-Pacific Partnership, setting up trade rules in Asia based on its own wishes, Zhang said.

There are many things that have to be addressed before the talks could start, including the US recognising China's market economy status, an issue that the two nations have long been arguing over.

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