

# The wages of naivety

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**S**HORTLY before the fateful US intervention in Iraq that led to the downfall and the eventual execution of the then Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein, Brent Scowcroft, who had been the National Security Advisor to the first President Bush, wrote a perceptive piece of advice that was published in the Wall Street Journal on 15 August 2002. Advising against intervention in Iraq, Scowcroft wrote that this 'would divert for some indefinite period from our war on terrorism' and that any military campaign 'would have to be followed by large scale long term military occupation.' The then policy makers in the US did not pay heed to Scowcroft's words of wisdom, with disastrous consequences both for the US as well as for the hapless people of Iraq who have suffered horrendously.

The belief then, and as it appears to be now, is that getting rid of odious dictators in the Arab World and replacing them by so-called democrats would serve the purposes of western democracies better. The belief also is that this is a better low cost option to fight terror linked regimes. This was sought to be done by avoiding 'boots on the ground' and by riding on the coat tails of so-called movements for democracy. When it was discovered that perhaps this might not be enough, Western intervention was secured by direct military action as in the case of Iraq or through the auspices of NATO air action as in the case of Libya. In the latter case, to give it legitimacy, a Security Council Resolution was also secured by reiterating the principle of 'right to protect' [R2P]. The failure to do so in the case of Syria has not deterred the Western powers from seeking the ouster of Bashar Assad through the mechanism of meddling by an assorted group of pro-Western powers such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar; the latter two are hardly paragons of democracy.

However, what is seen as a push for democracy in the Western world is largely seen as a move for grabbing the energy resources of Arab countries by large sections of people in the Arab World. That there is widespread unemployment, economic mismanagement and siphoning off of resources by a favourite few in most countries further adds fuel to the fire.

Most Arab countries are largely tribal societies where loyalty to the tribe and to tribal elders takes precedence over loyalty to the state. Thus, when one ruler is ousted as Saddam was or more recently Gaddafi by foreign backed intervention, it is seen by fellow tribal members not as the removal of a dicta-



tor but as the ouster of the whole tribe from state power structures. If Gaddafi was removed through violent military action sponsored by the West, then it becomes incumbent upon fellow tribal members to seek revenge by similar means. It is a matter of tribal honour.

Thus, on the fateful day that Ambassador Stevens and three of his colleagues were murdered in Benghazi, from where the Western sponsored 'revolution' began, the Libyan ruler Mohammed al Megharief was ironically visiting Bani Walid, a Gaddafi stronghold of about 100,000 people, trying to obtain the release of a man who was one of those responsible for the capture and subsequent murder of Gaddafi. In Bani Walid, even today, videos and propaganda openly glare out the virtues of Gaddafi! While the ouster of Gaddafi was still in motion, both the New York Times and the Washington Post had warned the US authorities of the infiltration of al Qaida groups within the movement. It is said that these groups provided the necessary muscle power to the 'revolutionaries.' But no one listened.

If there was a reluctance to heed the warning signals during the Libyan campaign, what might happen in the case of Syria? This fight is openly assuming the character of a sectarian struggle. It is certainly not a struggle for the installation of democracy or 'freedom'. President Assad by religious denomination is an Alawite, a Shiite off-

shoot, but he also has on his side most of Syria's religious minorities, including Christians, who fear a blood bath in case the Sunnis come to power. Perhaps out of spite that Assad has lasted so long, the Western backed 'revolutionaries' have had no compunction in accepting help from al-Qaida affiliates. The murder of the Syrian Defence Minister was attributed to al Qaida prowess in this field. It is only a matter of time that they may turn on their benefactors once the current battle is won. The Western powers are playing with fire.

The professionalism displayed in the murder of Ambassador Stevens could only have come about if it was pre-planned. It could not have been carried out in such a short time that was available soon after the release of the odious video that is roiling the Muslim world. It is hoped that regrettable as the murder of Ambassador Stevens is, those in authority in Washington might be persuaded to do their 'sums' once again and take a second look. Today, a single act of a misguided individual in the name of free speech has done incalculable harm to Western interests in the Muslim World. It is still not too late to do a re-think on the whole gamut of Western policies towards the Middle East.

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# My blood will hasten the liberation of my sacred land

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**S**IDDIQ Salik was born in Punjab. He completed his post graduation from Punjab University in English Literature and later on in International Affairs. Although he began his profession as a teacher and then became a journalist, he found his true calling when he enlisted in the Pakistan Army. In January 1970, he was posted to East Pakistan. On 16 December 1971, he along with other Pakistanis surrendered to the Joint Command of Indian and Bangladesh Forces. He held the rank of a Brigadier when he died in the plane crash that also killed Pakistan's President General Ziaul Haque.

Siddiq Salik authored "Witness to Surrender" based on his experiences in 1971 in Bangladesh. In page 104 of the book, he wrote:

"Their sabotage inventory included damage to, or destruction of, 231 bridges, 122 railway lines and 90 electric installations. They could not reach this figure without a high degree of motivation. Here is an example of their spirit. A Bengali lad was arrested in Rohanpura area (Rajshahi District) in June 1971, for an attempted act of sabotage. He was brought to the company headquarter for interrogation but refused to divulge any information. When all other methods had failed, Major 'R' put his sten-gun on his chest and said, 'This is the last chance for you. If you don't co-operate, the bullets will pierce through your body.' He bowed down, kissed the ground, stood up and said, 'I am ready to die, now. My blood will certainly hasten the liberation of my sacred land.'"

I was intrigued by this passage. It was a significant acknowledgement of the impression left by a mere boy of seventeen on a well-trained professional military officer in the midst of war. I wanted to know more about this freedom fighter, where he came from and his contribution in our struggle for independence. Without wasting anytime, I traveled to Rohanpur, which in 1971 was in the Rajshahi district, where Sadiq had this remarkable encounter.

In 1971, the 25 Punjab Regiment was deployed in and around Rohanpur several times. They were based mainly out of the Ahmadi Begum High School. Their deployment was a highly strategic one. Rohanpur was the site of the last rail station near the Indian border. A Major Mohammad Yunus was the Commander of the Pakistan Army in the area and was responsible for carrying out massive atrocities in the area. The major appears in the list of war criminals prepared by Bangladesh Government and he is listed as POW 595.

In 1971, Rohanpur had three railway bridges of which the Mukti Bahini destroyed one. Following its destruction, the Pakistan Army captured a young man Hassan Ali from his residence on June 4, 1971. A number of Freedom Fighters and villagers who were in custody in the Army camp remembered him being brutally interrogated. They also recall hearing gun shot and saw him being dragged away. His body was never found.

Hassan Ali came from a very humble background and was the son of Jhabu Mondal and Khushimonna. At the age of seventeen, he joined the Ansars. When the Liberation War began, he immediately crossed over to India and joined a training camp near Maldah. He and his team were assigned to destroy the third bridge in Rohanpur to cut off the Pakistan Army's line of communication. On June 3, 1971, after the successful completion of his mission, Hassan Ali went to see his family. His mother insisted on cooking some rice and daal before he returned to the Mukti Bahini camp. When Hassan went to wash his hands before the Fajr prayers, the Pakistan Army and a group of razakars who beat him and dragged him back to their camp. Villagers remember seeing him being tied to a tree and being beaten mercilessly in the Army camp area.

The young boy mentioned in Siddiq Salik's memoir of 1971 was none other than seventeen year old Hassan Ali. It was he who Salik mentioned of kissing the earth and declaring that he was ready to die if his blood would hasten the liberation of his land. It was Major Yunus who shot him to death when he could not extract information about the Muktijoddhas from the young man. Yunus fired bullets into his body, but could he triumph in the killing of a warrior who had no fear of death?

In his memoir, Salik states: "It was not an easy job for the Army to stamp out insurgents so sophisticated in technique and so highly motivated." In so doing, he paid a grudging tribute to Muktijoddha Hassan Ali and all his fallen comrades of 1971. In not being able to forget, he immortalized the courage of a young man who was unafraid to die in his struggle to free his motherland.

Hassan Ali's extraordinary courage in the face of certain death is a testimony to the determination of the ordinary people of Bangladesh who refused to surrender their dream of a liberated homeland. His unflinching valor is a powerful source of inspiration for people young and old, and a humbling reminder of the price paid by those who fought for the independence of this country, so we could be free.

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# Indian domestic politics and Bangladesh

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**F**ROM recent developments of Indo-Bangladesh relation, it appears that we are being caught in a limbo due to domestic political impasse of our big neighbour India. The rise of a high demanding regional party, The Trinamool Congress, in historically moderate West Bengal and the very nature of the federal structure of Indian polity have compounded the Indo-Bangladesh situation. With secular Awami League in power in Bangladesh which is considered more pragmatic and less rhetorical about our relation with our big neighbour in one side and the secular UPA coalition led by the Congress party of India on the other, it was a natural expectation that the relation between the two nations would flourish in the light of the worldwide trend of increased regional cooperation. What is going wrong? No political pundit would probably label Sonia-Manmohan-Pranab leadership of the present Indian government as belligerent towards smaller neighbours; yet there goodwill fails to deliver. If we take a closer look at the evolution of the party system of Indian democracy and the fresh change of political atmosphere in West Bengal we will probably be able to see where lays the gridlock.

Although, in one sense, internal political intricacies of India is not ought to be the concern of Bangladesh, we are entangled in it against our wish owing to the reduced capacity and internal strife of the multiparty conglomerate in power in India at present. Other than the Congress no other party in the coalition is a national party and the primary focuses of these parties are their local power bases at the provincial level where they want to grasp or maintain the political clout. These parties share lesser responsibility in terms of some important union government functions like foreign relation. The situation is worse when a foreign relation in question involves some conflict of interest between the federal government and the coalition partner regional party and the latter is unwilling to demonstrate a rational sense of responsibility as coalition partner of the central government and rather remain arrogant to score a high political point at local level. Mamata Banerjee is not even ready to recognise the broader benefit of West Bengal itself in an enhanced Indo-Bangladesh cooperation on bilateral issues like transit, anti-terror cooperation, reordering of border enclaves etc. For the moment, it appears that the key to the

gridlock is her coming of age as a responsible leader. It appears that Ms. Banerjee is all out to orchestrate a show to the West Bengal electorate; perhaps thinking of her long-term gain, that she, not the Left Front leadership, is the real hardcore protector of the provincial interest and West Bengal's well being is only safe in her hands. Given her state of temperamental mindset and hasty political behaviour, worsened by the weaker strength of UPA government in the face of it, it is prudent for Bangladesh government to take cautious steps. Pushing the central government too hard may not yield as they will not like to risk the survival of their coalition by pushing Mamata in turn. Moreover, the union government of India tend



to follow the federal polity norm of trying to take the concerned provincial leadership aboard while dealing with neighbouring nation. The same policy also applies in case of Sri Lanka when the central government endeavour to take the Tamil Nadu provincial government and the provincial allies into confidence. So, there is a rationale for being reasonably patient.

There may not be a dominant party situation, similar to the past in India ever or for a prolonged period. It seems that the Indians themselves have come already to terms with this reality. We, therefore, need to learn to cope with this fact of our indispensable neighbour. The truth is, regardless of our undesirability to be tied to India's domestic political configuration and reconfiguration in respect to the bilateral relation between us, we are being drawn into the equation due to our unique

geographic, commercial, cultural and historical linkage to them. It is not unnatural that many in Bangladesh would feel irritated by the situation as it stands. At the same time it is important that both the secular government do as much logically possible as they can to further ties for better cooperation and peace in the region. There are irrational and hawkish quarters on both sides of the border and they would not mind to exploit any chance to their own political ends and keep uttering their habitual and useless rhetoric.

Being swayed by a host of facets like provincial ethnicity, caste, communalism, and secessionism at some places and, in the positive side and mass aspiration for much publicised economic emancipation

Indian domestic politics has turned into a complex affair. India is no unitary republic and its federal structure has distributed political power centres across its length and breadth. The demise of the dominant party era of Indian National Congress has not done much good to its coherent entity and effective actor as a nation. Again, India is an emerging force in international politics and its animosity with precariously troubled Pakistan, silent competition with China and ameliorating terms with the US shapes and reshapes her regional and international objectives. Her troubled north-east makes Bangladesh and Myanmar naturally important to her. Convenient and cost-effective communication, transshipment and transportation are vital for the economic catching up of the Indian north-east with the spectacular development of many parts of the rest of the country. This is politically crucial for her as well.

We have no escape from India and all her internal, regional and international political and economic ambition, compulsion, needs and offerings; neither can she ignore or suppress us arbitrarily. India is a mammoth constellation of numerous and diverse sub-national identities with hostile neighbours in the north and north-west. Bangladesh needs to keep a watchful eye on Indian domestic and international politics. It is no denying that, in broader perspective, we both need each other mutually, despite domestic political hurdles, and we have to work towards comprehensive relationship equilibrium based on rational mutual benefits and keep reconstructing it as and when it gets off-balanced.

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