## Rainbow diplomacy



wo thoughts instantly spring out from Khaleda Zia's apparently redefining of her stance towards India. The first one comes as a confirmation of a known fact: Our leaders show their trump cards abroad, break news out of home, even set a tenor not conforming to their previous positions.

The second deduction is Khaleda Zia like Sheikh Hasina has nibbled more than she can chew. Sheikh Hasina, for her part, over-committed to India, Khaleda Zia may have done the same, each in her own way. The difference is not merely in style but in content as well. Hasina has already given to India more than she has got from her whilst Khaleda Zia's commitments are rhetoric without any immediate responsibility.

Pathologically reserving good copy not for home but abroad, Hasina unveiled her concept of interim government for the polls in the USA offering berths to elected members from both sides to form it. The calibration of what she said was narrow because she had just tossed the idea without clarifying who would head such a government.

And now Khaleda Zia on her trip to India has made radical statements, at least two of which do not rhyme in with BNP's traditional ideological proclivities. In the first place, while admitting to providing sanctuaries on Bangladesh territory to insurgents from northeast India during her rule in 2001-2006, she has given her word not to repeat this when in power. This has been greeted with open arms in India because its safety concerns have been allayed beyond political worries of changing of guards. The other thing BNP has apparently acceded to is transit right to India "as

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nectivity of the region." We think these are deliverable commitments with a guarantee for reciprocal and commensurate benefits accruing to Bangladesh.

But the third factor is the elephant in the room. The BNP's call for a clean slate approach leapfrogging from caustic innuendoes of yesterday to a new tomorrow should have a reality check. Politically and ideologically, BNP has had a strong anti-India slant largely for nurturing its right-of-centre, rightist and extreme right vote banks. Then there is the war crimes trial. If what sets BNP apart from AL is lost, will it erode its support base? Perhaps not, if relationship with India brings tangible reward as it is equally true in the case of Awami

League-UPA thrust for taking Indo-Pak relations to a new height of partnership.

Meanwhile, Veena Sikri, former Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh and head of think-tank looking after Indo-Bangla said, no particular significance should be read into Khaleda's visit, rather it should be seen as part of a process. Dev Mukherjee, a former Indian High Commissioner in Bangladesh even reminded over BBC that during BNP rule, support to insurgents from Northeast was likened to that provided to freedom struggle. It was seen among some BNP circles as "tit-for-tat" for armed Shantibahini forays into CHT and tribal refugees' encampment in the Indian state of Tripura.

By earlier standards, Khaleda Zia's latest overtures have been greeted with great enthusiasm adding, however, that "the taste of the pudding would be in eating."

The bottom line from Khaleda Zia's visit is a de facto bipartisan consensus on two vital issues occurring by accident and not by any design in India. Some Awami League ministers begrudged Khaleda Zia's visit with uncharitable remarks like its being "pointless" reminding India of Khaleda Zia's kowtowing to insurgents from the Indian northeast seeking refuge in Bangladesh. Even so, the fact is the hiatus between AL and BNP in their approaches to India has been narrowed down.

That even this limited commonality of approach couldn't originate in Bangladesh itself, it had to be for India to host it is ironical. Despite the experts crying their hearts out stressing unified stances from the major political parties on important issues of bilateral, regional and international concerns, no response has been forthcoming from political parties.

Such a degree of sophistication in inter-party relationship is a given in democracies like India and Britain. In Bangladesh context, where even basic consensus is unachievable on fundamental economic and political issues of survival, stability and sustenance, it is perhaps too much to expect that they will volunteer to synthesise their positions on matters of far reaching national interest. But, they should know there is no permanent enemy but permanent national interest.

There is one more moral of the Indian story which is that if we cannot solve our problems, others will be willy-nilly drawn into casting their influence on us.

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## You Tube Shutdown: Is the response logical?

ISHFAQ ILAHI CHOUDHURY

T has been quite a while since the Bangladesh government decided to shut down YouTube in Bangladesh. YouTube is a popular online social media, owned by Google, world's leading internet search engine.

The government's decision came in the wake of a film put up in the YouTube which was highly derogatory to our Holy Prophet (PBUH). The film, Innocence of Muslims, had started a worldwide condemnation triggering riots in many parts of Asia and Africa.

At the end of the day more than 150 people died and many hundreds were injured. Although, we did not see such violence in Bangladesh, various Islamist parties had organised protest rallies and a country-wide hartal on September 23.

Even though, the prime minister condemned the making and telecasting of such movies in the strongest term, the Islamist opposition tried to make political gain out of it; a country-wide general strike was one such

If shutting down YouTube was designed to take the steam out of the religious parties, it did not work. On September 29, 2012, based on a rumour of desecration of the Holy Quran by a Buddhist young man in Ramu, mobs of zealots descended on the local Buddhist community, burning down and looting their homesteads.

Most shockingly, they burnt down many pagodas, which were an intriguing part of our national heritage, and destroyed the Buddha statues and many valuable historical relics in

The rumour, proved false later on, brought nothing but shame on the nation.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh government, like many others in the Islamic world, requested YouTube to remove or block the offensive film. Ms. Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, came out strongly criticising YouTube's decision to put up a film that might jeopardise US interest in the Islamic world. However, the US government has no authority to shut down the YouTube operations or even to block the particular film from display. The US government has virtually no control on YouTube operations.

Thus, we are able to find hundreds of videos calling for the destruction of US states on YouTube all the time. Now that YouTube has refused to remove Innocence of Muslim and there is every probability that more such films may appear in future, what would our response be?

How long can we afford to keep blocking YouTube in Bangladesh and what would be its implication?

YouTube has become, globally, a major source of knowledge and entertainment. It has, in its contents, hundreds of lectures delivered by world-renowned professors from top universities such as Harvard, Yale, MIT and Oxford. Anyone can have access to these lectures free

Salman Khan, a young genius of Bangladeshi origin living in US, has put in thousands of videos dealing with high school mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology to high level scientific, technological and liberal arts subjects. Our students can benefit from these videos tremendously.

In fact, YouTube has innumerable educational videos for free on almost any subject -from philosophy to politics, from sociology to psychology. YouTube is also a store house of knowledge on religion too. For example, there are discussions, debates, lectures by worldrenowned scholars covering every aspects of Islam. There are videos of Hamd and Naat, songs composed in the praise of Allah and His Prophet.

Instead of shutting down YouTube, we should have exploited this wonderful media to our advantage.

There are instructions on various religious rites, such as how to perform prayers to rituals of Hajj. Many Islamic organisations around the world have used YouTube to propagate their messages. It is a wonderful medium of learning about almost anything under the sun.

YouTube also stores a huge collection of music from around the world. One is almost sure to find the music of their choice, irrespective of the language and genre and the time when the music was released. From cooking lessons to fashion design, from travels to adventure, from classic movies to the latest release, YouTube has it all.

Thus, YouTube has become an important medium of education and entertainment. It is simply a part of the modern world accessories.

The question now is: "How long can we or how long should we block the YouTube?" Of course, while it remains blocked, YouTube loses the revenue it could have earned. However, in

the long run, we individually, as well as our nation, stand to lose more than the company.

Most of those out on the street protesting would not have even heard of YouTube, let alone watch the offensive video. Moreover, there are literally hundreds of thousands of new items uploaded on YouTube everyday. There will always be something that might hurt the sentiments of someone or a whole community.

However, the system is designed so that you have to ask to be shown a particular video. If one does not ask, one does not see. If one does not like, one might shut it down. It means the users have full control over what they want to watch.

Instead of shutting down YouTube, we should have exploited this wonderful media to our advantage. For example, we should have made videos that would depict our Prophet (PBUH) in the true light of history. We could present to the people the real history of other religions and the eternal message of Islam.

Instead, we came out on the street breaking public property, causing huge economic loss and untold suffering to millions. In Libya, taking advantage of the situation, a militant group attacked the US consulate, killing the US ambassador. These incidents only strengthened the hands of those who had been propagating that there is something inherently violent in Islam.

We need to let our people know that by shutting down the media, we only cut ourselves off from the wider world. Today, it is YouTube; tomorrow it could be internet itself. The Islamists will be too happy to see all of us disconnected from the rest of the world, falling behind in the information age.

While others will be speeding along the information highway, we would be sitting by its side with nowhere to go. The government needs to reconsider the decision and lift the ban on YouTube. Many countries, including India and Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim majority country, have entered into protocols with Google whereby certain contents can be blocked without blocking the whole YouTube.

The question is: "Why can't we?"

The government needs to enter into meaningful dialogue with YouTube to resolve the video issue. A unilateral decision to block YouTube will be ultimately counterproductive and futile.

The writer is a retired Air Commodore.

## Australia in the **Asian Century**

GREG WILCOCK

HROUGH 40 years of diplomatic relations, Australia and Bangladesh have come to share much. We are proud of our shared history. Equally, we are excited by our shared future as partners in the world's most dynamic region. Asia's staggering rise is changing the world. This is a defining feature of the 21st century -- the Asian century. It has profound implications for our two countries and for people everywhere.

On October 28, Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard released a White Paper on Australia in the Asian **GREG WILCOCK** Century. The White Paper is government policy, and it

lays out an ambitious plan for Australia to navigate this period of economic and social change. The White Paper recognises that Australia's future is interwoven with the continued prosperity, sustainability and stability of our region. The White Paper provides a roadmap for the whole of Australia -- governments,

business, unions, and the broader community -- over coming decades. The Australian prime minister's goal is to secure Australia as a more prosperous and resilient nation that is fully part of our region and open to the world.

Australia's focus on Asia is not new. Our nation has a long history of engagement with the countries of Asia. Australia's relationships in our region are strong and robust. But in this

Australia must enter deeper and broader

The Asian century nity for all in the Australia. Asia's development has the Australian econstrategic environtrade with Asia as a trade has risen dra-Beyond economic many valuable

Australia's relationships in our region are strong and robust. But in this Asian century Australia must enter a new phase of deeper and broader engagement.

Asian century a new phase of engagement. brings opporturegion, including extraordinary already changed omy, society and ment. Australia's share of our total matically. gains, there are opportunities for building stronger partnerships across the region, including through closer educa-

Just as our region has a lot to offer us, we have a lot to offer our region. We have strong, world-class institutions, a multicultural and highly skilled workforce, and a productive, open and resilient economy. These assets have been reinforced by a series of economic reforms and sound decisions made over past decades, including Australia's effective actions to avoid the worst impacts of the global financial crisis.

Australia's strengths have long been reflected in its engagement with the countries of Asia. Over the past 50 years, we have been a reliable development partner working through collaborative relationships aimed at reducing poverty and improving sustainability throughout the region. Our financial, political and cultural links have deepened.

As this is true for Australia's links in the region overall, so it is for Australia's relationship with Bangladesh in particular. Our two-way trade has doubled during the past three years, reflecting Bangladesh's significant economic growth. Almost 30,000 Bangladeshi-born people live in Australia, and around 7,000 Bangladeshis are studying in Australia at any one time. The personal ties between us, forged by family, business, education -- and by our shared love for cricket -- are striking. Australia's development assistance to Bangladesh is growing strongly, having more than doubled during past five years, to around \$100 million this year.

As the Asian century unfolds, Australia will endeavour to build even stronger and more comprehensive relationships with countries across the region through collaboration and cooperation and based on trust, mutual respect and understanding.

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tional, cultural and people-to-people links.