

Committee fails to trace the money trail

Tk. 2,700 crore still missing

AFTER much hype, the committee entrusted to track down the single largest banking scam in the country has nothing much to report, save the fact that a mere Tk. 400cr has been traced. The bulk of the siphoned off cash to the tune of some Tk. 2,700cr remains elusive. It is intriguing to see the managing director of Hall-Mark group being treated with such leniency. Apparently the gentleman has neither answered queries of the committee nor furnished any documentation.

If we are to go by what has been presented in the committee's report, physical assets worth no more than Tk. 300cr are in possession of the group. Hence, in all probability, the rest Tk. 2,700cr may have been channeled out of the country. If that be the case the local currency had to be converted to some foreign currency before such transfer took place. Given the very large sums involved, it is likely that such transfer did not go through informal banking channels like hoondi. That means the formal banking channels may have been used and transactions using the banking channels always leave a paper trail. Unless the committee was exceptionally callous and there is no reason to indicate this since its members have considerable banking and financial expertise, where does that leave us?

By what means Hall-Mark group managed to hoodwink and buy over bank management officials and the regulator is all old news. Armed with facts and figures and having incarcerated some of the main perpetrators who have confessed to their complicity, the amply empowered parliamentary probe committee ought to have done a better job than this. Are we to assume that there is an attempt by quarters unknown to hush up the entire matter? Coming up with suggestions on how to prevent further such incidents does not absolve the committee of its responsibility to fully detect and recover the substantial public funds that were siphoned off.

Stop bullying Viqarunnesa School

It should be able to apply the rules

SOME influential quarters have allegedly threatened Viqarunnesa School and College authority with dire consequences unless it met their demand to admit children of their own choice into the school.

According to reports, the so-called guardians' forum of Viqarunnesa School and College making such an absurd demand wants 100 per cent of the admission-seeking candidates to fall under 'sister quota' to be given admission in the first year of the school's primary level. Already under pressure, currently the quota has been raised to 10 per cent from last year's two per cent.

This is a provision by which siblings of students studying in the school enjoy the stipulated quota to be admitted.

If the so-called guardian forum's demand is to be met, then school will have to deny a vast number of legitimate claimants berth for admission.

The local vested quarters have not only tried to bludgeon Viqarunnesa into breaking the existing sister quota system, but also shove their own list of candidates for admission down the authority's throat.

This is simply outrageous to ask for such privilege from the school authority at a time when thousands of parents and guardians are passing sleepless nights to get their children admitted to the reputed schools of the city.

This is totally unacceptable. We appreciate the Viqarunnuesa authority for the fact that they have not yielded to the unjust demands and threats from the vested quarters and reported the matter to the police.

We urge the government, particularly the education ministry, to take a serious look into the case followed by stern action against the powerful group trying to disrupt

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

December 19

1920
King Constantine I is restored as King of the Hellenes after the death of his son Alexander I of Greece and a plebiscite.

1927
Three Indian revolutionaries viz. Ram Prasad Bismil, Roshan Singh and Ashfaqulla Khan were executed by the British government.

1932
BBC World Service begins broadcasting as the BBC Empire Service.

1984
The Sino-British Joint Declaration, stating that the People's Republic of China would resume the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong and the United Kingdom would restore Hong Kong to China with effect from July 1, 1997 is signed in Beijing by Deng Xiaoping and Margaret Thatcher.

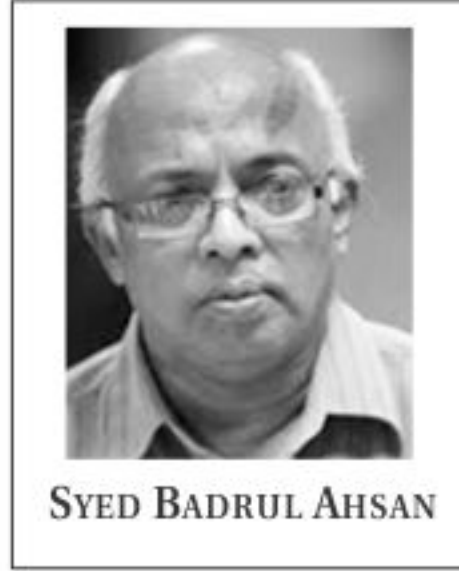
1986
Mikhail Gorbachev, leader of the Soviet Union, releases Andrei Sakharov and his wife from exile in Gorky.

2000
The Leninist Guerrilla Units wing of the Communist Labour Party of Turkey/Leninist attack a Nationalist Movement Party office in Istanbul, killing one person and injuring three.

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GROUND REALITIES

Pakistan . . . in December 1971



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THE moment is appropriate to revisit Pakistan as it was in December 1971. Given that we have a clear perspective on what went on in Bangladesh in that month of triumph, it follows that people in Bangladesh should also remember, or be enlightened on, how Pakistan coped with its collapse in its former province of East Pakistan. For students of South Asian history, it is important that the incidents, minor as well as major, which occurred in December 1971 be recalled in the interest of academic analyses in the future. People in Bangladesh know how their country came into being. People in Pakistan need to know why their state came to grief in Bangladesh barely a quarter century after it had been cobbled into shape.

The military junta led by General Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan committed a major blunder on December 3 when it launched an attack on Indian air force bases and ordered Pakistan's soldiers to open a new war front on the west. Bad reasoning was involved here. The regime thought that by attacking India from the west, it would be able to prevent East Pakistan from slipping into the hands of the Mukti Bahini. In the event, the Indians hit back hard. In the east, the Indian air force destroyed Pakistan's jet fighters on the ground through sudden and sustained attacks. Between December 3 and 16, therefore, Pakistan's forces in occupied Bangladesh would not have their air force to fall back on.

Meanwhile, even as open hostilities broke out between Pakistan and India on December 3, Yahya Khan announced the formation of a new civilian government, with him at the top of course. He appointed the

Bengali Nurul Amin prime minister of Pakistan, with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, chairman of the Pakistan People's Party and the man who would have been leader of the opposition had Sheikh Mujibur Rahman been allowed to take over as Pakistan's prime minister, as deputy prime minister and foreign minister. Bhutto was swiftly sent off to the United Nations, where his theatrics more than his diplomacy drew the attention of the world. Even as Pakistan's soldiers were on the retreat in Bangladesh, Bhutto refused to accept reality. In dramatic fashion, he tore up what he said was a copy of a ceasefire resolution at the Security Council and stalked out of the hall.

The surrender by Lt. Gen. Amir

Television images of Niazi signing the document of surrender before India's General Jagjit Singh Aurora left Pakistanis feeling humiliated. Overall, a state of shock enveloped the country. That the Pakistan army could lose a war was inconceivable for Pakistanis.

Abdullah Khan Niazi to the joint Indo-Bangladesh command in Dhaka on December 16 was telecast and broadcast in what till then had been West Pakistan, to the horror of Pakistanis. All this while, they had been fed on the lie that the Pakistan army was winning the war, on both the eastern and western sectors. They had been lulled into the belief, in the preceding nine months, that the "miscreants" (meaning the Bengali guerrillas) had been destroyed and everything had returned to normality in East Pakistan. Now, television images of Niazi signing the document of surrender before India's General Jagjit Singh Aurora left Pakistanis feeling humiliated. Spontaneous demonstrations against the regime broke out in various cities. Overall, a state of shock enveloped the country. That the Pakistan army could lose a war was inconceivable for Pakistanis.

There was no statement from either General Yahya Khan or his

regime on December 16. The rumour went round that Yahya Khan was too inebriated on the day, either out of habit or from shock at the news from "East Pakistan," to address Pakistan's people on the happenings in distant Dhaka. It would not be until the next day, December 17, that Yahya would go on radio and television, to inform Pakistanis that the war would go on and that Pakistan had nothing to fear. He did not tell his nation clearly that Bangladesh had emerged. His speech was palpably hollow and could not stem the howls of outrage coming in from different regions of Pakistan. On the same day, India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi unilaterally called a halt to Indian army advances into (West) Pakistan. US

President Nixon, his national security advisor Henry Kissinger and other world leaders, concerned that (West) Pakistan too might collapse before the Indian army, had appealed to Mrs. Gandhi for magnanimity.

A couple of days after the surrender in Dhaka, General Abdul Hamid Khan, chief of general staff of the Pakistan army and a Yahya confidant, appeared before a large group of army officers at army headquarters in Rawalpindi to explain the causes behind the disaster in Dhaka. He was shouted down, with epithets being thrown at him, to a point where he made a quick exit from the hall. The entire purpose behind Hamid's appearance, to gauge the mood and see if the Yahya regime could hang on to power despite the debacle in Bangladesh, was thus lost. It was then decided that Bhutto, then in New York, be sent for.

On his way back to Rawalpindi, Bhutto stopped over in Washington, where he met Nixon and Kissinger.

Arriving in Rawalpindi on December 20, he headed straight for the presidential residence for a meeting with Yahya Khan. When he re-emerged a few hours later, he was Pakistan's president and chief martial law administrator. As evening passed into night, President Bhutto addressed his countrymen, promising them that the war with India would go on, that there would be a new Pakistan, that "our brothers in East Pakistan" would have the support of the rest of Pakistan in "liberating" themselves from "foreign domination." He also announced the appointment of three new chiefs for the armed services, noting that in future the forces would have only chiefs of staff rather than commanders-in-chief.

Bhutto's speech on December 20, 1971, was rambling and hardly touched on the tragedy Pakistan had encountered in Bangladesh only four days earlier. On December 22, he ordered the freeing of the incarcerated Bengali leader, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, from solitary confinement and placed him under house arrest at a guest house near Rawalpindi. A few days later, he turned up at the guest house, to Mujib's surprise, and told him he was Pakistan's new leader. He tried to extract promises from Bangabandhu about Bangladesh and Pakistan keeping some links, something the latter declined to do.

By the end of December 1971, as global pressure began to build for Mujib's freedom, Bhutto moved to prepare Pakistan's people on the need for Bangabandhu to go home to Bangladesh. Meanwhile, he ordered that the members of the fallen junta - Yahya, Hamid and the others -- be placed under house arrest. He also had an inquiry commission constituted under Justice Hamoodur Rahman to go into the causes of Pakistan's military defeat in Bangladesh.

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Asean welcomes rising India as it looks east

KAVI CHONGKITTAVORN

INDIA'S decision to accede to the 1976 Asean Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in July 2003 was considered a major milestone in its diplomatic annals due to its swift-ness and timeliness. Immediately, it upgraded India's status as well as its role in Asean. Being the same country as China pledging to respect and sign on to the regional code of conduct helped instill the two Asian giants as the most trusted dialogue countries of Asean throughout the 2000s. However, change is in the air.

The ongoing rupture of Asean-China friendship over the South China Sea debacle has reduced the level of Asean-China mutual trust painstakingly built over the past two decades. Prior to July 2010, Asean-China relations were excellent, so were their body languages and narratives. Gone were the days when Asean felt comfortable in consultative sessions or giving preferences to China and vice versa.

Before that their cooperation in all areas went on smoothly without a hitch. None would have predicted the dire situation of Asean-China friendship as it appears today. At this juncture, Asean has been focused on the bidding code of conduct in the disputed maritime area. Their future ties are very much hinged on this particular progress.

Against such unsettling Asean-China relations and their strategic implications, leaders from Asean and India are scheduled to meet on December 20-21 in New Delhi. On the surface, the summit commemorates the 20th anniversary of their relations with a big theme: Asean-

India Partnership for Peace and Shared Prosperity.

Although their bilateral ties have been progressing steadily without any serious problem, they pale by comparison to the ever expansive Asean-China ties covering more than 40 committees, small and big, at all levels.

Two-way trade volume between Asean and India reached \$80 billion last year, which was much smaller than the overall Asean-China trade volume, which could reach \$500 billion over the three years. But the Asean-India economic potential is there as both sides are more focused now and want to take advantage of their free trade agreement concluded two years ago, which will be more comprehensive including service and investment.

Beyond the diplomatic pleasantries, both Asean and Indian leaders want to send strong signals to the world that their relations are more than skin deep and encompass more than economic, social and cultural sphere. The most important message would certainly be that their relations are getting closer and becoming more strategic.

India, with its rather benign approach to the grouping, is stepping up its diplomacy to establish foothold as a power to be reckoned with in the 21st century. Although India has never explicitly offered itself as a balancing wheel vis a vis China, the Asean countries have recognised that in the long run, India would be the most crucial strategic

partner of Asean in countervailing China's growing influence in the region.

Therefore, New Delhi's key strategic thinking from now on would essentially be assuring the Asean countries that India is a dependable and reliable strategic partner. From this perspective, India is complementing the US rebalancing efforts towards the region while Japan and South Korea and the rest of key US allies, are more focused on the security in Northeast Asia and South China Sea.

Asean leaders, as a whole, do not feel threatened by the rise of India. They welcome it and want to see India become more active in engaging them.

In 2005, Singapore's former prime minister Goh Chok Tong famously used an airplane metaphor terming India and China as the two wings lifting the Asean fuselage. Now Asean has to fly higher as the major powers are competing for sphere of influence. Asean must pilot the airplane in such a way that it would not lose its balance and move away from its established strategic interests.

In the past four decades, Japan used to be the main security collaborator of US regional security. Japan has been the principal country to provide financial aid to Asean and former Indochinese countries that allow them to attain development and economic progress.

Given the ongoing unsettling domestic politics and economic slowdowns, Japan's role remains important but it is no longer as crucial as before. In addition, the new US Asian policy under the first Obama administration has given Australia and the whole alliance

system a big push. The stationing of 2,500 American marines in Darwin was a sign that the US is committed to the security in the region. But the whole blueprint is an American design.

But for the interest of Asean, India is the obvious choice because of its proximity to Southeast East Asia and its blue-water naval capacities. It is not surprising that the Asean leaders are enthusiastic to attend this week's summit in New Delhi. After all, Asean considers India its pivot in the overall scheme of things in Asia.

This week, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will become the first Indian leader to meet all Asean leaders more times than all other predecessors. The 10th Asean-India Summit marks a remarkable turnaround for their relations which began in 1992, when it was admitted as a sectoral dialogue partner along with Pakistan.

India became the full dialogue partner in 1996. It took pains for Asean and India to overcome their past bad experience and policies when India recognised the Heng Samrin regime in 1980, which literally froze Asean-India relations for over a decade. It took the bold initiative of former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1991 to break the impasse and install some prominence to India's diplomacy in Southeast Asia with its Look East Policy.

With the more dynamic strategic landscape in the region, India cannot remain passive. The Asean leaders, as a whole, do not feel threatened by the rise of India. They welcome it and want to see India become more active in engaging them.

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