

Help finance safety measures

Shunning Bangladesh not the answer

THE call by US under secretary of state Wendy R. Sherman not to turn away from Bangladesh is good counsel. Bangladesh in the aftermath of Rana Plaza has been receiving unprecedented coverage in world media, most of it less than salutary. That is to be expected. What was not expected was a call by many in the West to stop sourcing apparels from the country altogether.

Putting a ban on readymade garments made in Bangladesh will do nothing to improve safety standards in the industry. It will end up putting out of work millions of workers, most of whom are women. The way forward is not punitive measures from Europe or the United States. Rather, constructive engagement by all parties, i.e. the government as regulator, the workers' unions, industry and buyers would improve matters. Regulators need to be made free from the influence of speed money. Manpower needs to be beefed up. Buyers cannot shrug off their responsibility of future disasters with the excuse that they were ignorant of where the orders were being placed. Manufacturers cannot look the other way by sub-contracting work to substandard factories.

The coalition of Western retailers which recently pledged to help finance fire-safety and other improvements need to do a lot more. The accord leaves much to be desired, especially since the agreement obligates retailer to pay a maximum of US\$2.5 million for a single factory to upgrade over 5 years. That is not going to go far in terms of attaining desired improvement in the short term.

Pre-hartal violence

Senselessly errant

AS if as a brutal surprise for the citizens, pro-hartal activists torched three vehicles in the city on the eve of today's country-wide shutdown called by BNP-led 18-party alliance.

The sudden arson attacks on unsuspecting transport operators on Tuesday were totally unacceptable, mindless and outrageous. Will the hartal-enforcers take responsibility for the damage inflicted on the vehicles so attacked?

Sad to say, the common people have been willy-nilly forced to suffer hartals along with their attendant violence. But they are not at all ready for any violence on the day ahead of an announced shut-down.

According to the 18-party opposition alliance, it has called today's hartal to press home its demand for cancellation of all cases filed against BNP leader Tareq Rahman.

But then Tuesday's violence involving burning of vehicles amounts to terrorising the citizens.

In fact, by such irresponsible acts of wreaking havoc on the lives and properties of the public, they are not gaining anything but losing whatever sympathy the people might have had about their demands and programmes.

It is expected of the opposition that it would behave sensibly and shun all types of violence whether on the day before hartal or during a hartal.

Whilst disapproving of today's hartal that will inflict enormous suffering on the people and cause a colossal economic loss to the nation, we urge the government to set opposition leaders free to create an engaging atmosphere.

Time to rebuild China-US trust

SUSPICION has overtaken trust in Sino-American ties in recent months for the summit between Chinese President Xi Jinping and the US President Barack Obama on June 7 and 8 to assume greater than usual significance. The two leaders will have a face-to-face chance to clear the air over such frictions as North Korean nuclear arms, East and South China Sea island disputes, cyber-hacking and trade issues.

It is good that they are meeting a few months earlier than planned. Before intervening distractions arise, it would be helpful if the two leaders are able to deepen their personal rapport in the relaxed ambience of the Californian venue. It is important to set the right tone for cooperation as regional if not global stability rides very much on how these powers, the world's two largest economies, conduct their relations.

Beyond immediate trouble-shooting, Mr Xi and Mr Obama can and should help their countries' ties mature. The two sides have dozens of mechanisms for communication and cooperation at various levels, including the China-US Strategic and Economic Dialogue and the China-US High-Level Consultation on People-to-People Exchange. They certainly should, as Mr Xi suggests, make the most of these, but there is nothing like a summit to reset the way the leaders view and deal with each other.

Mr Xi may propose an approach that includes sharing global leadership and a gradual end to regional alliances. This may call into question existing American arrangements with allies and, in particular, Mr Obama's pivot towards Asia that depends on such arrangements.

Some serious consideration should be given to whether the alliance-based system has become as obsolete as the Cold War. Global shifts call for a new long-term perspective which is nowhere more urgently needed than in north-east Asia, where Chinese and American interests overlap, along with those of their respective allies, North Korea and Japan.

A new relationship model can help ease American angst about Chinese influence over North Korea and China's fear of untoward consequences should it bring Pyongyang under ultimate pressure. Similarly, tension over China's Diaoyu/Senkaku claim can be lowered if Sino-US ties are placed on a more balanced footing.

The United States will continue to play an important role in the region, alongside China's expansion of its global role. Both sides can make more progress through cooperation rather than confrontation. This in turn depends very much on whether Mr Xi and Mr Obama succeed in building trust when they meet.

General Zia . . . and our history



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

As he struggled to restore order in the army, he failed to note that it was his wartime soldier friends who were dying one by one, thuvvat officers repatriated from Pakistan were in the ascendant.

ZIAUR Rahman's moment of glory came on the evening of March 27, 1971. At a time of intense darkness in the life of the Bengali nation, the young major, having repudiated the Pakistan army of which he had been a loyal officer since joining it in the 1950s, persuaded the country that there was light at the end of the tunnel. In the name of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, he proclaimed to the world that the people of Bangladesh were a free nation, that to dub the majority segment of the population of Pakistan was 'a cruel joke' which ought to 'befool none,' that indeed the world's powerful nations should be according recognition to a nation struggling to be born out of calamitous darkness.

There is little question that Ziaur Rahman's place in history was assured through that coruscating declaration of Bengali political intent. In the nine months of war that followed, he became an inevitable part of the process of the guerrilla struggle against Pakistan. In free Bangladesh, as deputy chief of army staff, he was careful to maintain professionalism in the way he performed his duties. His patriotism was never in doubt. Neither was his loyalty to the Father of the Nation, whom he extolled in an article for a Bangla journal. He hardly ever smiled. He was one of those who rarely fraternised with his fellow officers or with others. Discipline was the first word which came to mind when Zia was the object of study.

The Zia character, all these years after his assassination on May 30, 1981, remains a complex one. And it does because of the acts he undertook in the five or so years in which he

wielded authority as Bangladesh's first military ruler. He certainly did not bring the army to power. Khondokar Moshtaque and his assassin majors and colonels did. And then Khaled Musharraf's bid to restore political and military discipline collapsed in a matter of days. You could argue that Zia's rise to power was a fortuitous circumstance, a question of unintended consequences. Had he not been freed by Colonel Taher and his suddenly radicalised band of soldiers in the early hours of November 7, 1975, Zia would have remained a footnote, like so many other footnotes, on the pages of Bangladesh's tortured history. Had he chosen not to part ways with the principles of the War of Liberation, his reputation as a soldier would be on a scale that would arouse the envy of others.

History is all too often a study of riddles wrapped in enigmas couched in mystery. General Ziaur Rahman's years in power were a study in the destabilisation of the state caused by individuals he was unable to put the leash on. Hundreds of soldiers as also airmen perished through the eighteen failed coup attempts made against him. Troops loyal to the left-oriented Taher tried pushing him into circumstances where the army would undergo radical change. Zia knew he needed to emerge from Taher's shadow in order to be his own man. That was all understandable. What was not was the precipitate, ruthless manner in which he disposed of the man who had caused the so-called sipahi-janata biplob. It was suddenly a harsh Zia who sent Taher to the gallows in July 1976.

There was somewhat a kind Zia only months before July 1976. Informed by Captain Nawazesh early on November 7, 1975 that Khaled Musharraf, Najmul Huda and ATM Haider, beaten in the power game, had taken refuge at second field artillery in Shere Banglanagar, Zia gave out the clear message: 'Please see to it that they are not harmed.' In the end, the three officers were killed, only minutes after Taher had left the room where they were in the captivity of soldiers they

had thought were loyal to them. For perhaps that rare moment in his life, there were tears in Zia's eyes. The bodies of the three men had been shown to him. He was unable to act against their killers, for he was not yet in a position to bring the army under his full command.

If that was a compassionate Zia, there was that other side to him as well. Informed that Bangabandhu had been murdered, his response was almost flippant. There was the vice president to take charge, said he. In his years as the nation's first military ruler, Zia never claimed that he had declared independence in March 1971. On one occasion, he had some radio officials bring to him, at Bangabhaban, the audio tape of his March 27 speech from Kalurghat. In their presence, he heard his old speech no fewer than five times. When one of the officers, in clear sycophantic mood, suggested that all references to Bangabandhu could be edited out of the tape, Zia had a quick, brief reply: 'History cannot be changed.' He then walked out of the room.

But history did go through convulsions on Zia's watch. Bangabandhu and the Mujibnagar leaders were airbrushed out of it; the Pakistan army was never mentioned in the state's recapitulation of the 1971 war; the Indemnity Ordinance, designed to protect the August 15 killers from prosecution, was inserted into the constitution; and many of Bangabandhu's assassins were sent off on diplomatic assignments abroad. Zia turned the country away from Baksal and then, curiously, replaced it with politics that left old, unrepentant collaborators of Pakistan free to re-emerge into sunlight. As he struggled to restore order in the army, he failed to note that it was his wartime soldier friends who were dying one by one, that officers repatriated from Pakistan were in the ascendant.

In the end, Zia died the way others had died before him. Then General Manzoor died. Within months, Mohsenuddin was executed. The wartime generation of brave soldiers was gone within a decade of liberation.

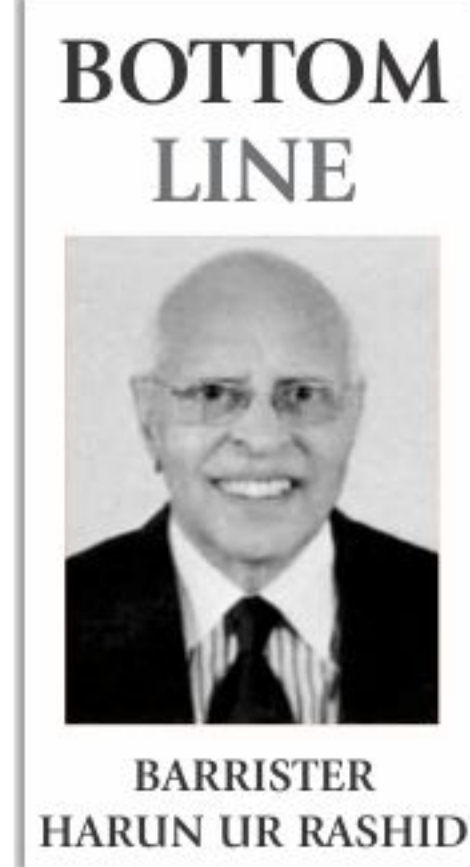
(General Ziaur Rahman -- freedom fighter, military ruler and president of Bangladesh -- was assassinated on May 30, 1981).

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INTERNATIONAL DAY OF UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPERS

29 MAY

Peacekeeping and Bangladesh



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

- to underscore the importance to maintain global peace;
- to pay tribute to those who were/are involved in the peacekeeping missions;
- to honour the UN peacekeepers who lost their lives for peace.

There have been about 67 UN peacekeeping operations since the first supervision of the 1948 truce between Arab states and Israel. Their white four-wheel-drive vehicles and their blue helmets render them familiar. A total 112,776 peacekeepers from 116 countries are currently working in the UN's 16 missions in four continents.

Peacekeepers are on duty wherever the UN is called on to solve problems too big for local authority. They are there to maintain peace and protect civilians. They work with governments to enforce peace and monitor human rights and often the conduct of elections. They are sent to a country as a result of a decision made by 15 members of the UN Security Council.

It is interesting to note that although there is no provision in the UN Charter on peacekeeping missions, it started in 1948 by the Security Council when UN observers were sent to monitor truce between Arab States and Israel.

However with the dynamism of UN Secretary General late Dag Hammarskjöld, the peacekeeping mission was expanded and now has been the most successful visible programmes of the UN with a full department of peacekeeping operations headed by an Under-Secretary General.

Peacekeeping mission arguably falls in between Chapter VI (peaceful settlement of disputes) and Chapter VII (action with respect to threats of peace) of the UN Charter.

Bangladesh's participation in the UN peacekeeping missions has become an important component of foreign policy and the country has attained a good standing in the comity of nations. Bangladesh's commitment to peace is demonstrated by its contribution to the UN peacekeeping missions.

This year, Bangladesh has stepped into 25th year of participation in UN

peacekeeping mission across the world. Bangladesh uniformed personnel have set values, norms and professionalism wherever they went. Their role was admired by successive Secretaries General of the UN.

In 1988, Bangladesh first joined the UN peacekeeping mission with only 15 military observers. As of May 2013, there are 8,826 Bangladesh soldiers and officers serving the UN in various conflict zones of the world. At least an additional contingent of 600 Bangladesh troops will join the United Nations peacekeeping operations soon.. That will take the total strength of the Bangladesh troops in the UN peacekeeping operations close to 9,500.

Bangladeshi army General led the peacekeeping mission in Mozambique



in 1994 and another army General in Georgia in 2002. One Bangladeshi General led the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia.

Since the peacekeeping missions are often in hostile environment, there have been casualties of Bangladeshi peacekeepers. As of September 2012, a total of 109 brave peacekeepers (including one woman army major) from Bangladesh died for the cause of world peace, security and humanity and 142 injured.

Bangladesh provided to the UN until May 2012, three Bell-22 helicopters, one MI-17 helicopter, one C-130 transport aircraft, a Frigate and an Off-shore Patrol Vessel to the UN for peacekeeping purpose.

Besides male keepers, Bangladesh sent women peacekeepers from air force and police Women keepers from police were sent to Haiti in 2010. "According to the UN mandate, our activities in quake-ravaged Haiti will be providing humanitarian activities besides community policing. We will also provide primary education, primary healthcare, protection on violence against women, prevention of HIV, Aids training and so on," said Rokeya Sultana, who would command the women's contingent.

Bangladesh can hold its head high in the global arena because the Bangladeshi uniformed personnel have earned the gratitude of millions in lands, mostly in Africa, far distant from Bangladesh. They have helped restore tranquility and peace in many war-torn parts of the globe and have ushered in an

era of hope in countries which had only known despair and war.

During the UN General Assembly session in 2012, the Secretary General Ban ki-moon conveyed their appreciation of the role of Bangladesh peacekeeping forces to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina while she was attending the session of the GA of the UN. Bangladesh became a member of a UN board for peacekeeping missions.

Bangladesh has earned the position of the Chair of the UN Peace-building Commission and the Membership of Peace-Building Fund.

Peacekeeping mission is to be distinguished from peace-making and peace-building missions.

Peace-making is usually aimed at cessation of hostilities and restoration of

peace while peacekeeping is to maintain peace, agreed between parties. That means once peace is restored, peacekeeping is to ensure that peace remains in the area.

Peace-building refers to efforts aimed at economic development, institution building, and more generally the creation or restoration within the countries of the conditions necessary to make them stable and peaceful after wars. It may involve rehabilitation of people and reconstruction of infrastructures. Peace-building after war is to help ensure there is no recurrence of war.

In future Bangladesh uniformed personnel may have to participate in the UN peace-making or peace-building missions of the UN. In the light of this, Bangladesh armed forces need rigorous training on the methods or mechanisms used for peace-making or peace-building.

At present 116 member-states contribute to the peacekeeping missions and interaction among peacekeepers from highest to lowest level is carried out in English/French. In this regard appropriate training together with learning and speaking in English language with ease and fluency may have to be provided by the Institute of Peace Support Operation Training for the Bangladeshi ordinary soldiers at Rajendrapur to carry out their work effectively.

The ultimate aim of any UN peacekeeping mission is to ensure that peacekeeping mission is no longer necessary so that people can live in peace, security and with dignity.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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No alternative to dialogue

The government and the opposition political parties are talking much about holding a dialogue but nothing has happened so far. Several weeks ago, the government said that they were ready to sit with the opposition. But the opposition demanded a written proposal from the government with specific agenda. Now AL and BNP are blaming each other as they could not come to an understanding. Political programmes like hartals caused immense sufferings to the people. I think if politicians from both camps sit together, they will be able to find out a way for holding a free, fair and credible general election.

M. A. Kashem
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Why block roads?

I do agree with the view expressed by Kabir Hossain Taposh on 24th May in your column. Traffic jam is one of the most serious problems of Dhaka. But our government and other political parties are not paying any heed to this problem. Rather they continue to hold political programmes on the road.

Shahbag, one of the busiest intersections in the capital, had been blocked for nearly two months. Those who live in the capital know very well how much people had to suffer due to the blockage of the road and how much traffic jam was created on other roads as a consequence. Political and other programmes can be held in parks and open spaces in the capital. I think political parties should adopt other means to raise their voices instead of blocking roads.

Maliha Jainab
Viqarunnisa Noon College, Dhaka

Govt's oppressive acts

Newspaper reports about the initiation of a dialogue for resolving the current political stalemate have raised hopes in us. People pray with their fingers crossed for salvation from such suffocating situation.

Regrettably though, the ruling party wants to shut down all the outlets through which the real picture of the country could be known. The government has stopped transmission of two TV channels and imposed restriction on publishing the daily *Amar Desh*. The reasons behind the closure of these media indefinitely have not yet been disclosed. Then again, the government has imposed a ban on public gatherings which will only exacerbate the situation. Through these measures, the government has just demonstrated its ugly and sinister motive.

Md. Nahid Iftekhhar
Muradpur, Chittagong

Reduce internet cost

Internet has become one of the most important necessities of our life. But, unfortunately, the cost of internet is very high in Bangladesh compared to our neighbouring countries. The average cost of 1GB data in Bangladesh is around Tk. 300, which should not be more than Tk. 50 in any consideration. The vision of building a digital Bangladesh should not be confined to words only. The government should work to make it happen. Reducing internet cost can be the first step towards building a digital Bangladesh.

Farhan Hoque
Department of Law
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Comments on news report, "US expects next polls to be fair, credible," published on May 27, 2013

Zman7

A clear, unbiased and conscientious comment from a high-ranking US official. I concur with such principled position that people have the right to voice their concern and demonstrate. Violence is never acceptable in democracy.

Anonymous

"Violence is never acceptable in democracy"--should be understood by our political leaders who can do anything for their own interest.

"ACC can turn to Interpol" (May 27, 2013)

Hafizullah

After arresting Tarique, Interpol should interrogate him to find how much bribe he paid and to whom in Bangladesh to fly to London, and their names should be disclosed.

Iftekhhar Hassan

It is good news that ACC can now seek help from Interpol to bring Tarique back to Bangladesh to face corruption charges. ACC also needs to open books on Abul Hossain and many other Awami League men involved in massive corruption that amounts to tens of thousands of crores taka. Law must be applied to all, and not only to opposition party and their cohorts.