

First Pakistan, now Turkey

FOUNDER EDITOR
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Punishment of a war criminal

Uncalled for utterances

WE take strong exception to the comments made by Turkey and Pakistan following the execution of Mir Quasem Ali for crimes against humanity. This is not the first time that these two countries have done so. After every such legal action against war criminals they have shed tears for those who were responsible for the death of three million Bengalis and the sexual abuse of a quarter of a million of our mothers and sisters.

We must also point out once again that the legal procedures followed in the trials have been in accordance with the established and accepted norms. There was enough scope for the accused to prove the allegations wrong. Nowhere in the trial for such crimes but at our International Crimes Tribunal is an accused given the right to appeal.

In this light we find the comments made by Pakistan particularly deplorable, for it is Pakistan's occupation army that had unleashed a reign of terror on the unarmed civilians of this land. Not only for flagrant interference into the internal affairs of our country, Pakistan's official stand is also a testimony to its refusal to come to terms with its role in 1971 and is an acknowledgement of the role of the likes of the accused. We are also deeply disturbed by the Turkish statement that the trial and hanging will divide our nation. This, to say the least, is a controversial comment, one that transgresses the norms of diplomacy. Turkey can be rest assured that the trial of war criminals unites us as a nation.

Mir Quasem has been punished not as a political leader but a war criminal. And glorification of a criminal is reprehensible.

No VCs in 37 private universities!

How are they still running?

IF it hadn't been for a news report it would have been hard to believe that almost half of all private universities do not have any VC and are being run with mostly acting VCs. This is unheard of as it is a given that a VC's post is crucial to maintain the quality of education in an institution and to ensure smooth operations of its administration. According to the University Grants Commission (UGC) private universities are legally obligated to ensure appointments of VC, pro VC and treasurer. But a report in this paper says around 25 universities do not have any of these posts filled while 37 have no VCs.

It is shocking that these universities have been enrolling students, taking fees from them without complying with such basic requirements. It is also surprising that they have been allowed to operate for so long by the governing authorities, namely the UGC.

There seems to be myriad reasons for such glaring gaps. These include - ambiguity regarding the time limit stipulated in the relevant law, disregard for the law by university authorities, impunity of institutions because of political clout, trustee boards wanting greater control of the university administration and alleged indifference of the education ministry (which approves appointments of VCs) and the UGC.

Around 5 lakh students study in private universities and pay the high tuition fees thinking they will get high quality education. But if almost half of these universities are operating without fulfilling a basic criterion as having a fulltime VC, how can we possibly expect them to achieve the academic excellence they claim to provide? The education ministry and UGC must strictly enforce the basic rules of running a university.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Lack of traffic control at Bashundhara R/A

Bashundhara R/A is a fast growing area. There are so many schools, universities, hospitals, shopping malls and other organisations in this area and the number of people living here is increasing day by day. But there are no pedestrian crossings, traffic signals and traffic police in this area and as a result, no vehicle tends to slow down at the R/A gate, posing serious risks of accidents. We urge the authority to take necessary actions in this regard immediately.

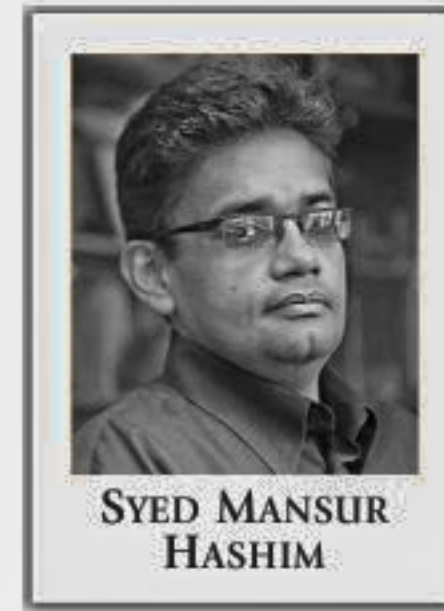
Syed Imtiaz Ali, Dhaka



PHOTO: AFP

Census data for tiger conservation

The Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest with its rich and unique biodiversity is divided between Bangladesh and India. According to the latest tiger census in the Sundarbans ecosystem, there are around 106 tigers in Bangladesh and around 70 in India. But how authentic is this census? Was the census conducted following the latest technologies? Do Indian and Bangladeshi authorities do joint surveillance, monitoring and comprehensive studies? It is important to have accurate and updated data for the conservation of the endangered Bengal tiger. Saikat Kumar Basu, Lethbridge, AB, Canada



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

REGULAR as clockwork, Pakistan has issued yet another statement after the execution of war criminal Mir Quasem Ali. The Pakistani government handed over a note to our High Commissioner in Islamabad on September 3 stating that "Pakistan is deeply saddened" over the execution of Quasem. While we are not particularly surprised at the current statement, since Pakistan has been dead opposed to the war crimes tribunal proceedings (from its inception) in Bangladesh, it is interesting to note that Turkey has been following suit with statements from Ankara about convicted war criminals facing the gallows for some time now. Turkey expressed its "sorrow" in the matter of the latest execution.

Precisely what the Turkish government means by its statement: "we stress once again that the wounds of the past cannot be healed with these methods and hope that this wrong practice will not lead to a separation among the brotherly people of Bangladesh" points out once again that Ankara is, in principle, aligned with Islamabad in portraying the whole trial process as a farce - a travesty of justice and one that is being pursued for the purpose of settling political scores that is going to divide the nation and its people. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Turkish government headed by Mr. Erdogan is either ill informed or, as much as we would like to disbelieve, sympathetic towards a defamation campaign against the government of Bangladesh on the trial process and attempting to portray some convicted war criminals as "great Islamic scholars".

Motiur Rahman Nizami, who was hanged on May 10, was anything but an 'Islamic scholar'; he was a man who headed the dreaded militia 'Al-Badr Bahini', the sole purpose for its existence was to round up, torture and execute the nation's intellectuals in the closing hours of the War of Liberation. Turkey chose to recall its ambassador from Dhaka in protest of his execution after its foreign ministry issued a strong condemnation, stating that it did not believe that 'Nizami deserved such a punishment' and that Turkey, which had earlier abolished capital punishment, was of the opinion that his execution would create hatred between Bangladeshis. We can literally draw parallels between Islamabad and Ankara in their reaction to the ongoing war crimes trial. While Pakistan lost the war in 1971, what exactly does Ankara hope to gain by siding with mass murderers who have faced years of litigation and have been handed the death sentence for crimes against humanity?

How is it that the Turkish government only chooses to see one side of the argument? Why does it not look at the atrocities committed in 1971 by a marauding Pakistani military in an attempt to stifle and eventually stamp out a nation's demand for independence? Where is its "sorrow" for the millions dead, the hundreds of



Bangladesh, Shahabuddin Ahmed, Oil on canvas, 1997.

thousands raped, the organised execution of the intelligentsia and the destruction of the economy in the nine months that constituted our war of independence? What about the "sorrow" of millions of people who

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never saw a father, mother, children or siblings who were killed or simply disappeared without a trace during those harrowing nine months of '71? Why does Ankara choose to ignore the international media spotlight that was on the then East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh), where daily atrocities were reported globally in the press, televised and reported on radio?

It is ironic to hear such lofty phrases as "healing the wounds of the past" and expressions of "sorrow" from a foreign government that has recently lived through a

failed coup-de-tat and which is now trampling over rights of its citizenry, including members of the armed forces, the judiciary and other sections of society in the name of restoring order and democracy. As per international media reports, the Turkish government has just ordered the sacking of yet another 10,000 police officers, judges, prosecutors, academics through a decree. This is in addition to the tens of thousands of people who have already been purged from the system through dismissal, arrest and incarceration. There is also talk of bringing back capital punishment.

In the post-coup days, our head of state called Mr. Erdogan to wish him well, despite all the things that have gone on in that country since then, which some may term as an attack on secularism and democratic institutions and culture. That is not the point. The point is that a line has to be drawn as to what sort of criticism we will swallow when it comes to dealing with issues as sensitive as genocide. We experienced it and the demand of a people for justice against the perpetrators of genocide, both domestic and foreign, that had been left hanging for four decades has come to fruition through a lengthy legal procedure after the present government came to power. Pakistan's position, as stated before, is unacceptable but not surprising because it was the perpetrator of genocide in '71 but Turkey's stand is incomprehensible and regrettable. President Erdogan and his government may have toned down its response to the hanging of the latest convicted war criminal, but it still leaves a very bad taste in our mouths. It makes us wonder whether our Turkish brothers truly want "brotherly relations" with us.

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Japan vs. the Currency Speculators

KOICHI HAMADA

WITH Japan's economy struggling to escape its deflationary torpor, the economic-revitalisation plan that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe launched in 2012 has come under growing scrutiny. But Japan's current travails, which have brought a concomitant decline in Japan's stock market, stem from the yen's appreciation - 24 percent over the last year - against major currencies. "Abenomics" - which included substantial monetary and fiscal expansion - has nothing to do with it. Since Abenomics was introduced, Japan's labour market has improved considerably: 1.5 million new jobs have been created, and the unemployment rate has fallen to just over 3 percent. Moreover, corporate profits have soared, and tax revenues have increased by more than ¥20 trillion (\$188 billion).

To build on these gains, Japan has promised a large fiscal expansion next month, which some describe as a piecemeal, temporary version of so-called "helicopter drops" (permanent monetisation of government debt). But there is concern that it will not be enough, if the yen continues to appreciate.

To be sure, expansionary policies, particularly monetary policies - a pillar of Abenomics - could contribute to currency depreciation. But the US Federal Reserve's dovish approach to exiting its own quantitative-easing programme, together with expansionary policies in other major economies, has weakened their impact on the exchange rate.

More recently, the United Kingdom's vote to "Brexit" the European Union, together with the introduction of negative rates by multiple central banks, including the Bank of Japan (BOJ), shook markets. Taking advantage of this nervousness, hedge-fund managers and other speculators have increasingly been betting on the yen's appreciation; indeed, the Chicago Mercantile Exchange shows substantial interest in the yen futures market.

In a flexible exchange-rate system, each country conducts monetary policy independently, based on domestic objectives, and accepts the resulting exchange rate. But when exchange-rate movements become sharp or erratic, monetary authorities have the authority - even the obligation - to intervene to smooth them out.

The Japanese authorities seem to



recognise this, in theory. On August 18, officials from the Ministry of Finance (MOF), the Financial Services Agency, and the BOJ gathered to discuss what can be done to stem the yen's appreciation. After the meeting, Masatsugu Asakawa, the Deputy Minister of Finance for International Affairs, declared that the MOF would act swiftly against exchange-rate movements deemed to be speculative.

The announcement was supposed to cause speculators to shake in their boots. Yet markets moved only slightly, within a range of a couple of yen to a dollar. After all, the MOF has made such threats before - for example, just after the introduction of the BOJ's negative interest-rate policy, and again after the Brexit decision - but never followed through.

Like Aesop's boy who cried wolf, the MOF has lost credibility, at least when it comes to the threat of intervention in currency markets. So speculators remain convinced that they are making a one-way bet - win big or break even - and continue to push the yen higher.

At this point, the MOF's words will not be enough to deter speculation. But the MOF remains hesitant to back its tough talk with action, not least because of American disapproval of supposed "currency manipulation." High-level officials at the US Treasury and Federal Reserve actively try to dissuade advocacy of direct intervention, including by me. An American scholar reacted angrily when I merely mentioned the word, as if it were an obscenity. American officials, for their part, emphasise that if Japan can be accused of manipulating currency markets, the US Congress will not approve the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

It is possible that the MOF will choose to keep the US on its side, and continue to offer only empty threats to speculators. Or it may simply vacillate until it is too late to take real action. Either approach may well produce the same disastrous result: allowing the yen to appreciate to damaging levels and causing Abenomics to fail.

What the MOF should do is intervene courageously in currency markets to stem the yen's

appreciation. Speculators will learn a tough lesson, and Japan's economy could get back on track. Though Japan may become a scapegoat for the failure of the TPP, it seems unlikely that the deal would be ratified in any case, given the current political climate in the United States. An alternative would be for the BOJ to purchase foreign securities.

Many hedge-fund managers, along with some economists, claim that the key to saving Japan's economy from deflation is a more direct helicopter drop, with newly printed cash delivered directly to consumers. Yet these same people are impeding effective macroeconomic policy, by betting on the yen's appreciation. Only when the speculators are brought to heel should such a bold - and highly risky - monetary policy even be up for discussion.

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