

# Consolidate the gains of liberation

BRIG R P SINGH, VSM (RETD.)

BANGLADESH was liberated from Pakistan occupation forces forty-five years ago on December 16, 1971. The country was declared independent on March 26, 1971 but remained under enemy occupation till December 16. During the intervening period of 297 days the Bangladeshi suffered heavily in terms of death, destruction, looting, arson, rape and displacement. Every Bangladeshi, every family was affected in one way or the other. One does not have to go into chilling details of the genocide perpetrated by Pakistanis on Bangladeshi who were their own countrymen at that time. But it would suffice to say that Bangladesh's Liberation War was one of the costliest in terms of bloodshed by citizens of any country in their fight for independence.

During the darkest period of Bangladesh's history the Indian government and people and the Russian government (USSR) stood with their Bengali brothers and sisters.

Almost ten million refugees took shelter in India. India was not as developed economically as it is today. But every Indian took the war of independence of Bangladesh as his/her own struggle and contributed in whatever way one could. Indian youths, especially from the state of Bengal, were at the forefront to help the refugees and take up the cause of Bangladeshi. President Pranab Mukherjee and Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee were amongst thousands of such youngsters. New Delhi helped in establishing the Provisional Government of Bangladesh which operated from Kolkata. The Indian Army provided all possible assistance in raising, organising, training and equipping Mukti Bahini. By the end of November 1971,

Bangladesh forces were organised in three infantry brigades with requisite artillery, one hundred thousand guerrillas and a number of sectors deployed along the Indo-Bangladesh border for facilitating guerrilla operations. Bangladesh also had a small navy and air force. With the formation of joint command of Indian and Bangladeshi forces in November 1971, the noose around the occupying Pakistan army was tightened.

December 3, 1971 Yahya Khan ordered air attacks on eight Indian airfields. The joint forces were waiting for such provocation and launched their multi-pronged offensive from all directions to liberate Bangladesh. The Indian navy blockaded the Bay of Bengal and Indian air force pounded the Pakistanis from the skies. The whole affair was brought to an end by the joint forces in just 12 days, forcing



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is greeted by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi during a stopover in New Delhi, January 10, 1972 after being released from jail.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

the Pakistan army's 93,500 from all ranks to surrender. The victory was gained against all odds. The US dispatched its mightiest naval task force of Seventh Fleet to the Bay of Bengal. It was supported by Great Britain which dispatched Royal Navy armada to the Arabian Sea. Both naval forces were checkmated by USSR's navy, forcing the British armada to take a U-turn and the seventh fleet downing its anchors mid Bay of Bengal. China made noises on India's Himalayan frontiers but was contained by India and countervailed by the USSR which deployed its forces on the Sino-USSR border. The clouds of nuclear war hovered on the horizon. But the biggest challenge was on the diplomatic front. In the UN all western countries, US allies and the Muslim nations formed a bloc to strangle Indo-Bangladesh forces'

attempts to liberate the country. These moves were stalled with the usage of veto power by USSR and skilful diplomatic manoeuvring by India.

The Indian Army and Bangladeshi freedom fighters fought shoulder to shoulder. Some of them were martyred with the same Pakistani artillery shell or volley/burst of fire. The Redcliff Line was not a barrier in 1971. The Indian Army officers and their co-warriors of Bangladesh became lifelong friends and are in touch even today. The friendship and cooperation between the governments and people of both countries was at its zenith by the end of 1971. When Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had a stopover in New Delhi on January 10, 1972 after being released from Pakistani jail, he was given a rousing welcome as the whole of Delhi turned out to greet

him. Bangladeshi and Indians, especially veterans of the Liberation War, hoped that the friendship of freedom struggle between the two governments and people would last forever and they would eradicate poverty together. But alas, it did not happen that way. Almost two decades of military rule in Bangladesh and the concomitant not-so-friendly attitude of New Delhi undid everything. Gains of war were lost in peace. There were accusations and counter-accusations, even hostility towards each other. There were instances of tension on Redcliff Line. Fencing was erected with guards keeping 24/7 vigils. Anybody trying to cross it would face bullets. All this seems to be fantastic and absurd.

Relations have improved in the past few years. The two nations are bound by common culture, language, history and eth-

nicity. The economies of eastern and north eastern states of India and Bangladesh are intertwined and dictate that the countries should cooperate in all fields—economy, culture, education—at the diplomatic and strategic level. Fifty-four rivers from India run into Bangladesh but sharing of water remains a bone of contention because of Bengal's Chief Minister's obstinate attitude, who, as a student in 1971, espoused the cause of Bangladesh's independence. During monsoons these rivers cause devastating floods in both countries with millions of cusecs of water wastefully draining into the Bay of Bengal. A canal linking all these rivers can be made and series of dams constructed to store water which can irrigate large chunks of land throughout the year in both countries.

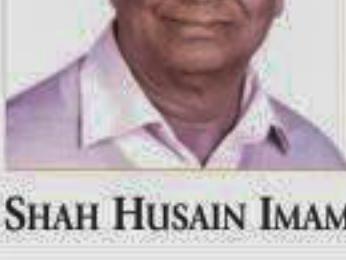
Cooperation between both nations can eradicate poverty which is the biggest challenge facing them. BIMSTEC and bilateral agreements must be put into place to speed up the growth rate. Bangladesh is the gateway to India's 'Act East' policy. It is an overall manpower surplus country. Same is the case with Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal. Projects to employ the people must be worked out jointly. BIMSTEC can be an ideal platform. North eastern states of India and north Myanmar have large chunks of sparsely inhabited territory. Agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, timber, forestry, tourism and allied projects must be initiated in these areas under the auspices of BIMSTEC besides road and rail construction for better connectivity. Biometric identity cards and central monitoring of movement can allay the apprehensions of illegal migration. Movement of manpower is essential with biometric safeguards. People-to-people contact needs to be enhanced drastically. Joint ventures in industry, IT, power generation and distribution, transit facilities, tourism, hospitality and allied fields can provide employment to millions.

Both countries are on an upward trajectory of economic growth. Bangladesh registered 7.05 percent growth during the last financial year with very good progress in Human Development Index, literacy and higher education. Governments of both countries have an obligation to consolidate the gains of the Liberation War for which people sacrificed so much. There is hope that the level of bonhomie and cooperation will touch the mark of 1971.

The writer is a retired Brigadier General of the Indian Army. He participated in the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

# Fake news epidemic: Inoculation possible

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

HILLARY Clinton has issued a call to action against the "epidemic" of fake news in a rare public appearance since her unexpected loss to Donald Trump, reported *The Guardian*. While paying tribute to the departing Senate minority leader Harry Reid she took the opportunity of flagging the concern thus: proliferation of false news stories online can have "real world consequences."

She cited an incident over the weekend to make her point: a man had opened fire at a pizza eatery, popular with children, after having read a false news story online. The story claimed that DC Pizzeria, another restaurant (specialising in the same delicacy), was harbouring children allegedly as part of a sex ring led by Clinton.

Thankfully, no one was hurt but what a close shave with danger it was for the visitors to the restaurant! Bogus, fabricated news with a dark intent has a way of fitting into the prejudiced worldview of either stupid or mischievous people. And, they may not be in short supply. What's basically scary is that they could care less about verifying the authenticity or otherwise of a posted, basically planted, piece of news.

Actually, Hillary Clinton is the most qualified person to be speaking on the



subject because she has felt the relevance of it with her own career. She saw her fortunes in the presidential race wilting like autumn leaves though she came tantalisingly close to seeing a spring-time blossom, thanks to malicious propaganda that upset the apple cart.

A BuzzFeed data analysis found stories going viral falsely claiming that the Pope had endorsed Donald Trump; Hillary Clinton was implicated in the murder of an FBI agent; and that she had sold weapons to ISIS. The American private internet company claimed

that all these "received more Facebook engagement than the most popular news stories from established outlets such as *The New York Times* and CNN."

Stories of falsehood reeking of vicious motives have been known, each surpassing the other in terms of the harm intended to individuals and communities.

In middle England, for instance, a fake image of a school being engulfed with fire went viral on the internet. It had 50,000 hits as anxious parents kept their wards from going to school. Not before the school

website uploaded the reassuring message that everything was indeed alright would pupils resume their classes. Here there was a website to unmask the vile act of, mind you, a faceless operator. Other victims of fake news might not have been as lucky to debunk false information as soon as it appeared.

*The Wall Street Journal* in a December 8, 2016 report by Jack Nicas depicted possibly the height of commercial abuse of internet to date! Opening with the words "Fake News Sites Inadvertently Funded by Big Brand" it informed that ads from well-known companies often appear on sites with false or misleading news.

"Yoko Ono: I had an Affair with Hillary Clinton in the 70s" read the headline in *World News Daily Report*, a website that 'peddles made-up stories.' Next to the story? An ad for the 2017 Ram 1500 truck made by Fiat Chrysler Automobiles.

At home, we have witnessed two major online hate campaigns. Circulation of fake posts was reported in 2012 when radical Muslims attacked Buddhist homes and temples in Ramu, Cox's Bazar. Reportedly, lately, extremist elements used the same medium to vandalise Hindu houses and temples at Nasirabad in Brahmanbaria.

It is learnt that news websites are creating Facebook pages with the help of tech-savvy groups to "embarrass the government and create panic among minorities and war crimes trial campaigners."

In America, after the failure to stop spread

of 'fake news' around the US election, Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and Google have been facing heightened public scrutiny. It is argued fake news is a 'threat' to democracy and that the users of research and social media platforms 'deserve better.'

Possible remedies are being talked about based on the fact that if society is harmed who the major platforms would be left to serve. A charity called Full Fact, an expert named Lora Kolodny informs us of "aims to end fake news with automated fact checking tools." It wishes to make fact checking as easy as spell checking—that would be a dream come true when and if it comes about!

But the charity involves fundraising: this being indicative of lack of direct investment by the major platforms. We think they ought to take a more serious approach than a 'charitable' one to combat online hate and fake news proliferation. They present a complex phenomenon with issues of anonymity, nipping it in the origin, preventing it going viral, and should it appear, seeking correction and retraction. The digital service providers, technologists, print and online media and the users—all need to do their part to fend off the menace, methodically under an international convention.

For our part, we must have a homegrown pool of technicians, equipped and ready 24/7 to be ahead in the game.

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## QUOTABLE Quote



JOHN F. KENNEDY

American politician who served as the 35th president of the United States.

Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

#### ACROSS

- 1 Last year's frost
- 2 Pastel shade
- 3 In the area
- 4 Unaided
- 5 New York City attraction
- 6 Piano part
- 7 Auction buy
- 8 Doctor's charge
- 9 Sandy hills
- 10 Scents
- 11 Calendal items
- 12 Staff member
- 13 Tediess sort
- 14 Massage
- 15 Cloth fold
- 16 Studio work
- 17 Atlas page
- 18 Equip
- 19 Diner dessert
- 20 New York City attraction
- 21 Ted anchor
- 22 Rich cake
- 23 Tea additive
- 24 River through Alaska
- 25 Pillage
- 26 Clarinet's cousin
- 27 Race entrant
- 28 Color
- 29 Record needle
- 30 Survived
- 31 Ailing
- 32 Bread buy
- 33 Writer Rice
- 34 Give over
- 35 Charged bit
- 36 Aspiration
- 37 Dark fur
- 38 Sturdy wood
- 39 Keats work
- 40 Sock part
- 41 Important age
- 42 Part of a match
- 43 Band-leader Tommy
- 44 Messy room
- 45 Clock numeral
- 46 Interlace
- 47 Choir voice
- 48 Blueprint
- 49 Urban oasis
- 50 Wild about
- 51 Early garden
- 52 Mamie's mate
- 53 Singer Rawls

### YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



### BEETLE BAILEY



### by Mort Walker

### BABY BLUES



### by Kirkman & Scott