

Hakaluki Haor facing disaster

Immediate action required to avert ecological catastrophe

WE are highly concerned at the report of the grim prospect that the biggest 'haor' in the country is facing. There is a possibility of grave ecological disaster, if corrective measures are not put in place immediately. The Hakaluki Haor, spread over an area of 18000 hectares and rich in fish resources, is also a haven for migratory birds. River erosion and the miseries caused to the population living in the surrounding areas of haors, beels and chars are nothing new to us. But the effect of the erosion of the Kushiara on Hakaluki will be of immense proportion. Along with valuable human lives, it will take heavy toll on the environment, besides depleting our marine and aquatic resources. This will not only create a critical imbalance in the ecology of the vast area but also result in the destruction of biodiversity of the haor.

Admittedly, checking river erosion is not easy nor is it possible to make a reversal of the situation, but clearly we should have done a better job of preventing the erosion to come to this level. It is indeed disconcerting to learn that last year Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) had placed nearly 10 crore taka for a project with the Water Ministry to check the erosion but apparently it is yet to take off. It is now evident that urgent measures need to be taken in order to avoid the imminent danger of the Kushiara River getting merged with the entire haor area.

The agencies concerned simply must take all measures to save the Hakaluki haor on an urgent basis. There is a good deal at stake. At the same time, we wish to see that the Administration identifies the officials concerned, whose negligence may now lead to disastrous consequences for the haor, and brings them to book. Let this not be yet another issue of vital public interest swept under the carpet. We have seen in the past that accountability was not a priority for the Administration when it involved the people of the rural areas who otherwise did not belong to any vested interest group.

Meaningless hartal

AL and its partners should have withdrawn it

WE see no reason why the Awami League (AL) and its partners that make up the fourteen party alliance are going ahead with their hartal programme. With the AL joining the parliament, a very positive mood has been created. A withdrawn hartal would have strengthened the atmosphere.

Frankly, we must admit, the rationale of hartal, as articulated by the opposition, is lost on us. If this hartal has been called to protest mainly the price hike and the shortage of power supply, would abstaining from all activities for the day help in ameliorating the situation one bit? On the contrary, we are sure, it is only adding to the misery of the common man by causing more price hike, among other things, and hardly helping to improve the current state of power supply in the country.

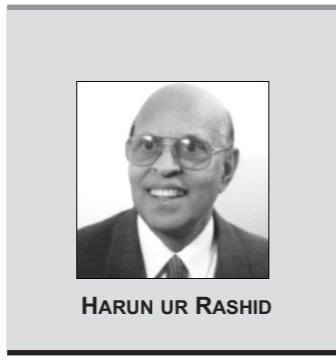
We repeat what we have said in the past regarding hartal. Hartal helps nobody. It makes no sense to add to the misery of the public who are already burdened by the overall oppressive conditions prevailing in the country. In fact the hartal is disproving the very logic that the opposition offers in support of their call for hartal.

The public has viewed the first step of the AL, to rejoin the parliament, in a very positive light, although the decision to boycott the parliament was unjustified in the first place. The opposition should not have carried on in a way that displayed on their part a lack of feeling for public sensitivity.

Also, calling off hartal would have had two positive effects, we feel. Apart from sparing the public the great discomfort and saving them from the disruptions of normal life that hartal causes, the gesture by the opposition would have put the government in a moral bind to reciprocate in equal measure by treating with due importance the opposition's stance on the important political issues.

This could only have been to the benefit of the country, as it would have helped, we hope, remove the deficit of trust between the government and the opposition and allayed the harsh political atmosphere that is prevailing in the country.

Tipaimukh Dam and Bangladesh



HARUN UR RASHID

the cost of Indian Rs.6,000 crore. **Why Bangladesh is involved?** If the dam would have been built deep inside India's south, Bangladesh would have nothing to say in the matter, but the proposed dam is only 100 km away from Bangladesh border and even at the construction phase will have an impact on Bangladesh, let alone after its completion.

Tipaimukh Dam and its effects on Bangladesh

The use of water of rivers is of two kinds: (a) non-consumptive and (b) consumptive. Non-consumptive use does not reduce the flow of water of the river, while consumptive use reduces it. For example, dam for hydro-electric power (Kaptai Dam) may be called non-consumptive use, while diversion of

ism. The Aswan Dam (1964) has caused ground water level to rise with increased salinity, destroying Egyptian antiquities. The consequences of the change of the normal annual flow of the river due to the Tipaimukh storage dam are not known from environmental point of view.

Second, uncertainty of the structure of the dam or collapse of the dam from earthquake or any natural

Finally, the dam will have adverse effect on Bangladesh's economy. As a regional power, India has certain responsibilities to its neighbours. It is not understood as to why India ignores such responsibilities at a time when regional economic cooperation under Safta is being enhanced and consolidated. There is a perception in Bangladesh that India does not care for people of Bangladesh.

perceives Bangladesh uncooperative and inward-looking, while Bangladesh thinks India uninterested and obstructive.

Pending bilateral issues, such as ensuring peaceful border, border fencing, illegal movement of people, non-implementation of the 1974 Mujib-Gandhi Agreement including the non-exchange of enclaves with each other, unresolved sea boundary, dispute over the ownership of Talpatty Island and huge trade deficit with India, cast a shadow on bilateral relations and the proposed dam further adds complication of the state of bilateral relations

The proposed construction of dam without the input of Bangladesh seems to confirm the perception of India's gross insensitivity to interests of Bangladesh. Perception of people matters most in bilateral relations.

Conclusion

Some say that the power and strength of a big neighbour is like beauty; if you have it you don't need to go around saying it. India does not need to show its power and strength to Bangladesh in building the dam without any consultation with it. Bangladesh is disappointed with the unilateral construction of the Tipaimukh Dam as it appears to unnecessarily twist the arms of Bangladesh.

Trust and mutual respect for each other constitute the edifice of long term good relations. The relationship needs constant nurturing and care. The bottom line is while Bangladesh does not compete with India, it does not appreciate being pushed around by a big neighbour.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

INTERFERENCE with normal flow of water of a national river has always been seen as troublesome for a government. There are examples both in India and Pakistan where states/ provinces reject plan of dams on a common river by the federal/central government.

It becomes an inter-state dispute when such interference has impact on a neighbouring country. Not only rules of international law but also good will towards a neighbour are at stake. That is why empirical evidence suggests that a country who plans to interfere with the traditional flow of river, whatever its purpose, should discuss the issue with a neighbouring country prior to its action.

Against this background, the proposed construction of the Tipaimukh Dam has naturally emerged as another prickly thorn in Indo-Bangladesh relations. It is not understood why India has allowed this controversial dam to be built without disclosing the layout of the dam with Bangladesh.

It is reported that India (North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Ltd.) has floated an international tender for the construction of dam on the Barak river in Manipur state for generating 1500MW electricity at

Although the dam is designed to generate electricity and not to divert water from the river, the fact is that India by constructing it is to change or modify the traditional flow and use of the Barak river, that constitutes the source of two rivers, Surma and Kushiara, in Sylhet, which in turn feed the mighty Meghna river of Bangladesh.

The anxiety for Bangladesh is that India has not taken Bangladesh into confidence on the details of the dam and therefore Bangladesh cannot properly assess as to how the dam will affect Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is hurt that India fails to understand and respect the sensitivity of a small neighbour by constructing unilaterally the proposed dam, violating its obligation towards Bangladesh under rules of international law and contrary to good neighbourly relations.

water through barrage and feeder canal (Farakka Barrage) is for consumptive use.

Although Tipaimukh Dam may not reduce water, it certainly changes the traditional flow of water that has been running since time immemorial. The change of river flow of water through construction of a dam would have many ramifications on the lower riparian country, Bangladesh.

The adverse effects of the Tipaimukh hydro-electric dam could be several and some of them deserve mention below: First, the days of construction of huge hydro-electric dam have gone because some of the big dams constructed in the 50s and 60s have deleterious effects on environment. The World Bank does not favour any more construction of dams due to their mass environmental vandal-

calamity (northeastern Indian states are believed to fall on fault lines), causing release of storage water will have unknown adverse impact on Bangladesh, including severe flooding of lands of millions of people in Bangladesh.

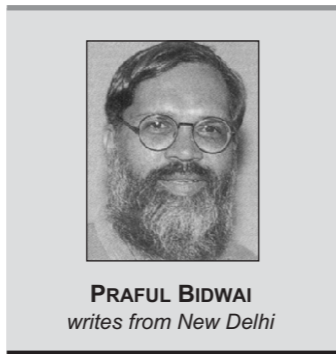
Third, the quantity of release of water from the dam by India to Bangladesh is not known. The change of quality and normal flow of water will affect cultivation of crops. No one knows how it affects wetlands in Sylhet district.

Fourth, major rivers including the Padma, Teesta, Brahmaputra and their tributaries are reportedly drying up in Bangladesh due to continuous withdrawal of waters of common rivers in the upstream through India's various dams and river construction work. Another huge dam certainly poses a threat to Bangladesh.

BOTTOM LINE
Some say that the power and strength of a big neighbour is like beauty; if you have it you don't need to go around saying it. India does not need to show its power and strength to Bangladesh in building the dam without any consultation with it. Bangladesh is disappointed with the unilateral construction of the Tipaimukh Dam as it appears to unnecessarily twist the arms of Bangladesh. Trust and mutual respect for each other constitute the edifice of long term good relations.

Deep divisions on fast breeders

Nuclear deal in peril?



PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

And to that calculus, he has added sovereignty: the determination of which facilities are civilian and which are military "has to be made by the Indians." Indians alone must decide India's strategic interests.

His statement, made without prior authorisation from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), has raised the stakes in the talks between New Delhi and Washington. This will probably complicate matters

reactors. Dr. Kakodkar's interview, and his detractors' hostile reaction to him, suggest that a serious division exists in the Indian Establishment over the nuclear deal.

On one side are the "nuclear ultra-nationalists" who see the July agreement as an American attempt to cap India's nuclear capabilities. On the other are the "pro-US pragmatists," who themselves are nuclear hawks.

A third current is the growing

manace. The DAE has soaked up thousands of crores to deliver a pitiful 2.5 percent of India's electricity - along with a host of safety problems.

The DAE claims its programme is largely indigenous. But it has borrowed/bought technology from the UK, US, Canada, USSR, Russia, France, China, Norway. It loathes international safeguards.

In general, the DAE resists all accountability. It was dragged,

before his visit, the momentum could soon be lost. That won't be bad for India. It's in no one's interest to legitimise and "normalise" India's (or the US's) nuclear weapons. The route to real security lies in their elimination worldwide.

If a special exception is made for India in the global nuclear order, that will promote proliferation, not least in Iran, Pakistan, Israel, North Korea, and possibly Saudi Arabia. A world crawling with more nuclear powers will be more insecure. Nuclear power is not the answer to India's energy problems. Globally, its contribution to energy generation is shrinking. It's expensive, and fraught with grave environmental and health hazards, including the problem of hazardous wastes that will remain radioactive for thousands of years.

Nuclear power is not the answer to India's energy problems. Globally, its contribution to energy generation is shrinking. It's expensive, and fraught with grave environmental and health hazards, including the problem of hazardous wastes that will remain radioactive for thousands of years. High oil prices don't warrant more nuclear power, but investment in renewable energy and conservation. The nuclear deal will trap India in a bind, narrowing her policy freedom.

and impel Washington's policymakers to harden their positions. In fact, Dr. Kakodkar seems to have chosen this sensitive stage in the negotiation process to hit back at his detractors who have orchestrated a media campaign to mount pressure on New Delhi to quickly finalise the July 18 deal on Washington's terms - while ignoring the "isolationist," "outdated," "reactionary" nuclear scientists.

Dr. Kakodkar's interview was calculated to press Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to exclude FBRs from the civilian list, along with all facilities at Mumbai's Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, the uranium enrichment plant near Mysore, and at least two power

peace movement, which opposes the deal because it legitimises nuclear weapons, consolidates a US-India strategic alliance, promotes the wrong energy path, and encourages proliferation. What explains the Establishment split and Dr. Kakodkar's extreme step of going public? How will that change the outcome of the Indo-US talks? Will India gain or lose if the agreement falls through?

The "ultra-nationalists" comprise the bulk of India's nuclear and defence scientists-engineers, and reflect the culture of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), which has always been pampered despite its poor perfor-

kicking and screaming, into endorsing the nuclear deal. It's now wreaking revenge.

The "pro-US pragmatists" believe that India should sign on the dotted line to get its nuclear weapons legitimised and strengthen the US-India alliance even if that means compromising on foreign policy options. That's the shortcut to Great Power status.

This group has suddenly discovered the virtues of nuclear electricity. It always knew that the deal wouldn't be strictly equal. India would have to satisfy the US that the civilian-military separation is "credible" and "defensible." No wonder this lobby also campaigned for India's vote against

Iran. The DAE wrongly presents FBRs as the gateway to energy security. FBRs are not a proved, mature technology. They have been a failure everywhere, including in France, the world's fast-breeder "leader."

However, the DAE has a trump card in the text of the deal, which says the civilian-military separation would be "voluntary" and "phased," although, in reality, it

won't be "voluntary." Dr. Kakodkar has capitalised on this and tried to checkmate the PMO. He knows the PM cannot sack him without attracting the charge of acting under US pressure. It's extremely unlikely that the US will accept exclusion of FBRs from the civilian list. FBRs are an open-ended plutonium source for both civilian and military purposes. India has raised the stakes on FBRs. But the US can do that too. A beleaguered President Bush, whose acceptance ratings have plummeted to barely 40 percent, is unlikely to push the deal through if FBRs are excluded.

If the deal is doesn't go through

Hizb ut-Tahrir's long history

MOHIUDDIN AHMED

MOHIUDDIN Sardar in his article "The long history of violence of Hizb ut-Tahrir" (The Daily Star on 28 January 2006) presents a shallow and inaccurate analysis of this party. He appears to be avoiding the party's 53-year track record of non-violent political activity throughout the world.

Sardar reluctantly concedes that 'while HT has openly engaged in politics ... it has not, strictly speaking, advocated violence'. However in the very next paragraph he contradicts himself by saying that "this does not mean it is not violent". He further states without evidence that 'violence is central to HT's role'. Nowhere in the article can the reader find any proof to substantiate claims.

HT from its very inception set out on a non-violent path to re-establish the Islamic state. It

believes the only truly permanent way to realise this objective is to convince the masses and generate public consensus for comprehensive implementation of Islam, just as the Prophet Muhammad (SM) had done so previously. Using only non-violent means (according to the restrictions of the shariah), HT has worked tirelessly to expose the injustices of ideologies forced upon Muslim Ummah by colonial powers and their lackeys (so-called Muslim rulers). In the tradition of classical scholars, HT has researched (ijtihad) and presented real and practical solutions to contemporary societal problems. Its literature and activities mirror these basic points and its 53-year history bears testimony to this. Furthermore, despite its members being persecuted by Western friendly leaders such as in Iraq (under Saddam), Uzbekistan, Turkey, Egypt among others, the party has remained true to its

HT is recognised as a sincere effort to counter colonialism in all its forms and struggle for implementation of Islam in all aspects of society. However, with its success it indirectly invites criticism. This is to be expected and HT welcomes healthy debate to prove its point, with only one condition that it should be an open and frank exchange of ideas without the disparaging presumptions.

principles and has not been tempted into the path of violent persuasion. This unflinching resolve stems from a very basic philosophy, namely, changing society requires changing political ideas through intellectual debate rather than forceful imposition. As an example, it has recently been the most vocal against those who have been responsible for destructive activities in Bangladesh, in the name of Islam.

In its short history of political activity in Bangladesh, HT has been on the forefront of the struggle against confrontational politics

that has become so characteristic of Bangladeshi parties. HT has been persistent about the Islamic alternative that can rescue the nation from the clutches of power hungry politicians.

Sardar correctly identifies HT's objective to establish an Islamic state (Khilafah) that would be ruled by a single Khalif. He labours the point, though correctly concludes, that for HT this means the shariah would be applied comprehensively and uncompromisingly in this Islamic state. This is for our learned author is tantamount to 'intolerance'. This in turn, he continues,

would mean 'doing violence' to those who disagree or have other interpretations as there is no room for diversity within a 'no compromise' shariah.

The fact is that the shariah already has provisions for all people, not just Muslims. The Khilafah is not a theocratic state where only believers of Islam may reside. The first state established by the Prophet (SM) consisted of a minority of Muslims. Non-Muslims had the security of being full citizens of the Islamic state and enjoy extra rights accorded on an account of a difference of faith. The history

of the Khilafah confirms that non-Muslims were well looked after. Specific instances can be sighted. In 1492 when Muslims lost Spain to the evil crusaders, the Jews accompanied the Muslims to escape the inquisition courts that ultimately led to genocide at the hands of the Christians. Till this day there is a Spanish speaking Jewish community living in Istanbul, which at the time of their migration was the capital of the Islamic state.

The Khilafah existed for over 1400 years and stretched across the globe. Its contribution to human progress remains unmatched.

While Europe was in the depths of the Dark Ages, Muslims led the world in advancement in all areas for many centuries. So convincing was the success of its implementation that after the Khilafah was destroyed in 1924, not one single country abandoned Islam. How is it possible for Sardar to claim that it had never been willingly applied but 'always forcibly imposed by authoritarian regimes'?

Certainly Sardar can earn a lot of praise from the West currently grappling with the unstoppable tide of Islamic revival that threatens the gains from their suzerainty. Why doesn't he quote the Bush and Blair's fanatical statements on the same subject? Where is his critique on Blair when he said, "We will proscribe Hizb-ut-Tahrir..." (5 August, 2005) and when Bush terms Islam as "The murderous ideology" (11 November, 2005), and when UK home secretary Charles Clarke said, "... there can

be no negotiation about the recreation of the Caliphate; there can be no negotiation about the imposition of Sharia law..." (21 October 2005)?

Sardar's article conforms to the familiar colonial construct in assessing Islam and its adherents.

In Bangladesh, HT is working for the interests of her citizens. It is recognised as a sincere effort to counter colonialism in all its forms and struggle for implementation of Islam in all aspects of society. However, with its success it indirectly invites criticism. This is to be expected and HT welcomes healthy debate to prove its point, with only one condition that it should be an open and frank exchange of ideas without the disparaging presumptions.

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