

Case against 50 thousand!

Making a farce of law enforcement

IMPLICATING as many as 50 thousand people in two separate cases for torching passenger launches on the Buriganga last Sunday has been both farcical and preposterous. While a big incident like this one should have impelled a full-fledged investigation, the FIR was done quite hastily and on a weak legal premise. Hence one may justifiably ask: How can anyone include so many unspecified people in an FIR, and then go about doing the investigation? More often than not, such wide casting of net opens floodgates for exacting vendetta and rent seeking.

Our experience shows that when a large number of people are found involved in a mass demonstration or agitation, law enforcers usually go for mass arrests, betraying little interest in law enforcement as such. In majority of such cases mass arrests are done with an ulterior motive, which is, extortion of money from the arrestees whether guilty or not. Hence, there cannot be any better explanation for filing cases against such a vast number of people in the Keraniganj incident on Sunday. Little wonder, as a result of the two cases, people in the area are living in an environment of intimidation, uncertainty and panic.

We strongly feel there is something amiss in the way law operates in this country, especially while dealing with fallout of any massive agitation. The knee jerk reaction is to go for indiscriminate hauling up of people as a show of some post-haste dynamism with innocents bearing the brunt of it all.

On this count, we feel there should be a clear directive from the higher courts of the country against such evident malpractice of indiscriminate and arbitrary arrests that are not legally tenable, far less morally acceptable. This pernicious practice is an outright mockery of law of the land and it severely negates the purpose of governance. We believe this also deals a blow to the credibility of the legal system.

While we demand a proper investigation of the Keraniganj incident, we at the same time want the law enforcers to apply caution so that no innocent person is subjected to persecution but the guilty persons are brought before the court of law.

Sri Lankan minister's shocking comments

Attempts to muzzle media must be resisted everywhere

HAUKISHNESS in a desperate situation is generally counter-productive. But that truth appears to have been lost on Sri Lanka's defence minister Gotabhaya Rajapakse. He has just pronounced judgement on the work of some journalists in his country, describing them as 'traitors'. He has even gone a disturbing step further by calling for a sweeping censorship on the Sri Lankan media. The minister's comments obviously raise the legitimately indignant question of how he has given himself the right to judge the patriotism or otherwise of individuals he is not happy with. They also worry people that an individual in such a responsible position should be threatening an entire profession with possible government control over their professional work.

Of course, it is not unknown how the media in our part of the world are often at risk of being made inoperative by the whims and callousness of the powers that be. Journalists have often paid a high price for their courage and objectivity in such places as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in recent years. But nowhere have the threats against them been as blatant as those held out by Sri Lanka's minister. It is therefore only right and only to be expected that the Free Media Movement in Colombo will condemn his remarks and demand that he be 'held accountable for his words and reined in.' It is a response that all people conscious of the need for truth and a free working of the media anywhere will agree with and will in fact reinforce by joining in the call for high government functionaries to exercise self-control. It has always been the media which have been in the forefront of the struggle against censorship and against any form of arbitrary authority exercised by governments anywhere in this region and elsewhere. We believe that what is happening in Sri Lanka is a symptom of the malaise afflicting many countries in the region.

There is an ever greater need today to be vigilant against all attempts to regulate the media in the region. It is only a vibrant, active press that can project the ground realities in fraught situations, such as those prevailing in Sri Lanka today. We will expect that the Colombo authorities will desist from following through on the defence minister's suggestions.

Nuclear winter

The first nuclear war, in which the US dropped two atomic bombs on civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, in 1945, so shocked the world that, despite the massive buildup of these weapons since then, they have never been used in war again. Nuclear-winter theory now shows not only that the superpowers still threaten the existence of the rest of the world, but that the newly-emergent nuclear powers threaten the former superpowers, perhaps not with extinction, but with serious consequences including drought and famine.

ALAN ROBCK

A nuclear war between India and Pakistan, with each country using 50 Hiroshima-sized atom bombs as airbursts on urban areas, would produce climate change unprecedented in recorded human history. This surprising conclusion is the result of new research published in 2007 by a team of scientists who produced the pioneering work on nuclear winter in the 1980s.

Research conducted jointly by Western and Soviet scientists 25 years ago discovered that an all-out nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet

Union would produce a nuclear winter, plunging the planet into freezing temperatures and making it so cold and dark that the world's capability to grow food would be destroyed, sentencing billions of people to starvation.

Within two years after this work was publicised, the nuclear arms race ended. Several years after that, the Soviet Union and the Cold War ended. Mikhail Gorbachev has said in interviews that the consequences of nuclear winter were an important factor in his actions at the time.

But now, although the total number of nuclear weapons in the world is about one-third of the peak number in the 1980s,

there are more nuclear states, with Israel, India and Pakistan each having an arsenal of 50 to 100 weapons.

A nuclear war between any two of these so-called "small" nuclear states, using less than 0.3 percent of the nuclear weapons in the world today, with less than 0.03 percent of the total explosive power of the global arsenal, would produce so much smoke from the resulting fires that it would plunge the Earth to temperatures colder than those of the Little Ice Age of the 16th to 19th centuries.

This would not be nuclear winter, but growing seasons in the midlatitudes of both hemi-

spheres would be shortened by weeks, temperature on land would be several degrees lower, and precipitation would be much lower in some places. Some crops would never reach maturity, and the food supply for many millions would be threatened.

How could this happen? Megacities have developed in India and Pakistan, providing tremendous amounts of fuel for potential fires. If there were a nuclear war between India and Pakistan, the direct effects of the weapons, blasts, radioactivity, fires and extensive pollution would kill millions of people, but only those near the targets.

However, the fires would have another effect. Cities and industrial targets would produce massive amounts of dark smoke. The fires themselves would loft the smoke into the upper troposphere, 10 to 15 kilometers, or 6 to 9 miles, above the Earth's surface, and then absorption of sunlight would further heat the smoke, lifting it into the stratosphere, a layer where the smoke would persist for years, with no rain to

wash it out. New calculations show that for 50 nuclear weapons dropped on each country, on the targets that would produce the maximum amount of smoke, some black smoke would be immediately washed by rain and some would be lofted into the stratosphere, transported around the world by the prevailing winds.

New results, predicting the smoke's travel, were made possible by a state-of-the-art general circulation model of the climate. For the first time a complete calculation of not only atmospheric but also oceanic circulation was conducted, including the entire atmosphere from the surface up through the troposphere, stratosphere and mesosphere, to an elevation of 80 kilometers, or 50 miles.

Previous calculations had not been run for the 10-year simulations, as done here, and did not follow the smoke lofted into the upper stratosphere, where it would persist for many years.

There continues to be some

confusion in the public mind about whether the nuclear-winter theory was correct, and about whether it was subsequently shown that a nuclear war between the superpowers would produce something more like a nuclear autumn, with less climate change than first thought.

Subsequent research suggests that the nuclear-winter theory was indeed correct. The new climate modelling system was also used for two additional scenarios, the entire current nuclear arsenal used in a conflict between the US and Russia, and the use of one third of the current nuclear arsenal, also targeting the US and Russia.

The first of these additional scenarios is the same as the baseline scenario used 25 years ago. It turns out that the cooling from the smoke would indeed plunge continental areas in both North America and Eurasia into sub-freezing temperatures for years. And the effects would last much longer than previously thought.

The primitive climate models

in the regime of President Ayub Khan.

Politics does make strange bedfellows. It also throws up some improbable permutations and combinations. Ataur Rahman Khan, chief minister of pre-Ayub East Pakistan, years later became a toothless prime minister in the regime of Hussein Muhammad Ershad. He then told us why he did not like the word *maangsho* (meat) and preferred to use the term *gosht*.

Why such semantics should have concerned him is anyone's guess. But he did leave us all mystified somewhat when he eventually quit the Ershad regime and then produced a book listing all the disappointments he had encountered in government. Look deep; and you will spot some humour there.

And, by the way, few among us have forgotten the copious manner in which Kazi Zafar Ahmed wept at the funeral of Ershad's mother. More than a decade earlier, the burial of Bangabandhu's father had led to a huge explosion of tears in Khondokar Moshtaque Ahmed.

The father of the nation stared at Moshtaque, perhaps wondering why his emotions had got so rolled. That was comedy. It turned into unmitigated tragedy only months later when Moshtaque presided over the wholesale murder of Bangabandhu's family. His eyes, at that point, were absolutely dry, most Caligula-like.

There was a brazenly powerful comedian in Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. His followers told people in 1970 how bullets had rained down on him in a place called Sanghar. Amazingly, not one touched him or so much as graze him. He leapt

from the jeep he was in, bared his chest in a manner typical of sub-continental movie action, and dared his "enemies" to shoot him.

In 1971, at the UN Security Council, he led many into thinking he was tearing up a copy of a resolution the body had been recommending over Pakistan's crisis in Bangladesh. Truth be told, Bhutto was only tearing up a piece of paper he had on him.

Be that as it may, there has, of late, been an appalling absence of wit and repartee in South Asian politics, with, of course, the rare exceptions of men whose remarks have often enlivened exchanges with their rivals.

India's Pilo Modu was once accused of having shown his back to a parliamentary colleague, whereupon the speaker asked Modu to explain himself. Modu, a corpulent man, stood up and deadpanned: "Mr. Speaker, if you look at me you will see that I have no front, no back, no flanks. Indeed, I am round all over. How then could I have shown my back to the honourable member?" It brought the house down.

And that was self-deprecating humour at work. Not many among us -- in politics, in business, in journalism, indeed anywhere -- possess that courage to laugh at ourselves. Why are so many among us turning into so many humbugs? Why must men and women in high places always project a grim demeanour to the outside world?

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Of politics and wit, of tragedy and calamity

GROUND REALITIES

It was humour that, in a way, revitalised American politics, in much the same way that it had carried politics to strangely charming heights in the times of Winston Churchill. He believed he was a glow-worm among so many ordinary worms. And Benjamin Disraeli? He defined the difference between tragedy and calamity thus: "Observe Mr. Gladstone over there. Now, if he fell into the Thames, it would be a tragedy. But if we tried to pick him out of it, it would be a calamity." We need not reflect overmuch on the raucous laughter that in consequence reverberated through Westminster.

Carter loses his job."

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Now, if he fell into the Thames, it would be a tragedy. But if we tried to pick him out of it, it would be a calamity." We need not reflect overmuch on the raucous laughter that in consequence reverberated through Westminster.

Now, coming back to our own Bangladesh, we were informed the other day that the Awami League had finally been permitted by the caretaker government to observe a token hunger strike on May 5. Well, there may not have been anything of the bizarre about it, but there is surely an element of the queer here.

Here is a political party whose members and followers are in the mood to go hungry for sometime.

That is perfectly all right. But you need official permission to do that?

If the situation had been different, if a body of people had threatened to march out on to the streets threatening to cause commotion and perhaps even mayhem (as Fazlul Huq Amini has just done), we would not be surprised in the government's taking an interest in things. But, then again, the rules of politics seem to be changing, even mutating, in this country.

Think of the reformists in the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. These days even Saifur Rahman raises the precondition of a release of Begum Khaleida Zia in order for meaningful general elections to be held later this year. You might say there is hardly anything wrong there. Ah, but there is. If the reformist group now truly wishes the Begum to be out of incarceration, it can simply renounce its claim to be the symbol of the BNP and go back to being led by the Khondokar Delwarul-faction of the party.

But that is the serious side of the issue. Where do you spot the comedy here? It is in that contradiction (the naughtier ones among us call it hypocrisy) among the reformists.

To have come thus far in rejecting Begum Zia's pre-arrest decisions and openly throwing down the gauntlet at her, only to tell us now that they remain loyal to the lady is somewhat too loaded for us to take in.

There have been comical situations earlier as well. Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq was denounced as a traitor and his ministry in East Bengal was dismissed rudely in 1954. And yet it was the "traitor" who went on to serve as Pakistan's interior minister before playing a twilight role as governor of East Pakistan. Politics is fun, you might add.

When Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy went visiting the United States as Pakistan's prime minister in the latter part of the 1950s, it was ambassador Mohammad Ali Bogra who went around ensuring that the head of his country's government did not lack for anything. Only a few years earlier, Suhrawardy had been law minister in the cabinet of Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra. General Ayub Khan served in the Bogra cabinet too. In 1963, Bogra died in harness, as foreign minister

Shifting balance of power in the Middle East

BOTTOM LINE

The US's goal of marginalising the influence of Syria and Iran in the Middle East has backfired because the "Shi'ite crescent" now runs from Beirut to Tehran. Both Hezbollah and Iran have stood taller before the Arab World after the 2006 July war with Israel. Israel has no chance of destroying Hezbollah, and those who think so are in the wrong side of history.

opponent. Furthermore, in assessing power, one has to take into account actual and potential power. Standing military forces are the most obvious example of actual power. Potential power is one that will be available at a future date.

Power can be tangible or intangible. Tangible power is a resource that is readily countable, such as weapons, standing army and infrastructure, and intangible power is invisible, such as leadership, will power, wisdom and morale.

By one estimate, the five-power structure seems to be the ideal number of states keeping a balance of power. Five states will bring a stable balance of power because one state will be able to play the role of a balancer by joining with other states.

The 19th century provides an illustration of maintaining balance of power among five European powers, namely Britain, France, Prussia (Germany), Austria and Russia.

At first Britain and France were kept apart by colonial rivalry,

Britain and Russia by mutual suspicion over Central Asia, Russia and France by monarchy-republican animosities. Napoleon wanted to change the balance of power among five states in Europe, but he was defeated.

By 1907, France, Britain and Russia held the balance of power against Germany and Austria. The First World War in 1914 began to change this balance of power, but not because of any ideological fight against each other. It was simply to upset the prevailing balance of power in Europe.

During the Cold War, neither the US nor the Soviet Union used nuclear weapons in the knowledge that a nuclear attack by one side would invite immediate retaliatory nuclear attack from the other -- in view of the fact that both had second-strike capabilities. Furthermore, the two superpowers had implicit agreement about their "no-go-areas" -- for example for Moscow in Latin America and for Washington in Eastern Europe.

A forced peace prevailed during the Cold War because the two

superpowers held the balance of power. Some say balance of terror because each power knew that it could be annihilated if it attacked the opponent. This is a deterrent system, based on sheer terror during the Cold War, and this doctrine was known as Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD).

In many ways, MAD is currently applicable to India and Pakistan, and many suggest that if Pakistan had nuclear weapons in 1971 the War would not have occurred.

Shifting balance of power in the Middle East

The Middle East is undergoing a period of fluidity because Israel, that had supremacy of power so long, is being threatened by Iran. Iran's size, population, skills, resources and nuclear potential have posed a threat to Israel.

Iran has been able to spread its influence thanks to the mistakes of the Bush administration. In the past, Iran's power was believed to have been curbed by its neighbours -- Iraq's Saddam Hussein and the Taliban of Afghanistan. Since these regimes have gone,

Iran has emerged as the regional power in the Middle East, extending its influence not only in Iraq and Afghanistan but also in Syria and Lebanon.

Israel's closest ally, the US, is aware of it, and that is why even the Democrat presidential contender Hillary Clinton recently said that Iran would be wiped out if it attacked Israel. This statement is partly to entice Jewish voters and partly to demonstrate her resolve to maintain the status quo in the Middle East.

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Tehran has now full control of the situation in the region. The Iraqi government currently supports Hezbollah, much to the surprise of the Bush administration. Moqtada Al Sadr of Iraq even threatened to take the war to Israel.

Iran's nuclear program is likely to proceed unabated. Even if the UN Security Council imposes harsher sanctions on Iran, it would not matter for Iran as Tehran thinks it is its sovereign rights to generate energy through nuclear reactors.

It is noted that France uses nuclear power to generate 77% of its electricity, and Russia produces

20% of its total energy requirements. More than 35 nuclear power plants are currently under construction around the world, 24 of them in Asia including in China. Today, about 12,500 nuclear plants provide safe, clean and cheap energy to about 32 countries, Indonesia, Malaysia and Egypt are to develop nuclear energy.

Furthermore, Russia's relations with the US are now characterised by a growing number of disagreements, and Russia does not see events in the Middle East or elsewhere through the same prism as the US does. Russia wants to play its role in the Middle East and cannot be sidelined. Russia has maintained close relations with Iran and supplied the nuclear reactor at Bushehr (Iran and Russia signed the agreement in 2002).

Israel's conflict with Hezbollah is inseparable from the struggle for balance of power in the region. What we see today in the Middle East is not a traditional armed conflict but a conflict that is intended to redraw the balance of power in the region. It is a struggle between Israel backed by the US and Iran, implicitly backed by Russia.

Imperialist Kipling's "great game" in Central Asia of the 19th century seems to be replayed in the Middle East in the 21st century. No wonder history repeats itself.

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nuclear weapons is to be commended, but these new results show that even much more modest nuclear arsenals leave the possibility of a nuclear environmental catastrophe.

Having survived the threat of global nuclear war between the superpowers so far, the world is increasingly threatened by the prospects of regional nuclear war. The consequences of regional-scale nuclear conflicts are unexpectedly large, with the potential to become global catastrophes.

The combination of nuclear proliferation, political instability and urban demographics may constitute one of the greatest dangers to the stability of society since the dawn of humans. Nuclear weapons cannot be used. Only abolition of nuclear weapons will prevent this potential catastrophe.

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