

Felling of trees in the tea gardens

Reconsider decision

IT is not surprising that the large-scale felling of trees in a tea garden in Srimangal has outraged people everywhere. We wonder whether the forest department's order, issued in 2008 permitting the cutting down of the trees, had considered all the relevant pros and cons of the issue. It may be recalled that the order was held in abeyance (by then more than 1000 trees had been cut down) by the forest department in the face of opposition from the locals living in the area and environmental activists, only to be allowed again, this time with enhanced rate of royalty.

We understand that tea gardens and the adjoining areas are pruned from time to time as a part of the process of maintenance and upkeep; and with every tree chopped down a new sapling has to be planted. In this case the fact is that the clearing is being done as part of the expansion plan of the garden.

One should not have any reservations about development of the tea garden except that the area under expansion is inhabited by Khasias who have been living there for a long time. The forest is not only their home but also provides for their livelihood and daily needs. It goes without saying that the deforestation will adversely affect the Khasias who risk displacement from their ancestral homes. It will have adverse impact on their traditional way of living apart from the negative consequence on the environment as well as on the fauna and flora in the area. We must also consider how extremely important it is to maintain our forest coverage and do everything in our capacity to keep as many trees alive as possible. This is needed for us -- the inhabitants of this land.

We could not empathise more with those affected by the order and also with the environmentalists with whose voice of concern we would like to add ours. We feel that the government should prefer an appeal against the HC verdict because there may be merit in the comments of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon that not all the facts were produced before the court, and those that were produced were incomplete and one-sided.

And in this regard, it would be our request to the HC, although it had given the go ahead to the felling of the trees on a writ by the owner of the tea garden, to reconsider its decision, given that there are precedence of the HC's taking suo moto notice, particularly of matters relating to the environment and human rights.

The passing of KG Mustafa

He kept faith with his beliefs

K.G. Mustafa belonged to a generation we can rightly regard as pioneers in our world of journalism. His death at the age of eighty-four is therefore a harking back to a time when values underscored the presentation of news and with that a formulation of opinion in newspapers. Throughout his adult life (and it actually commenced in his teens), Mustafa made it a point to remain steadfast to the vocation he had opted for, a position he did not waver from in his long life. Following the partition of 1947, he clearly seemed to have decided that while the newspaper was going to be his preoccupation, both as a principle and as a profession, it would also serve as a vehicle for the promotion of political and social causes. The trajectory of his life shows all too well that Mustafa upheld the causes he believed in. In the chaotic politics of 1950s Pakistan, followed by the harshness of the decade-long Ayub military regime, Mustafa and a very large number of his peers saw little reason to suspend the battle for truth.

Mustafa's long career in many ways went beyond the call of journalism. His identification with such progressive causes as the 1952 language movement was an obvious pointer to the path he had chosen for himself. In the more dramatic era of the 1960s, when Bengali nationalism was beginning to be defined in all the substance of purposeful politics through the Six Points and related developments, Mustafa knew he needed to make his contribution to politics as it was fast shaping up before the nation. Like many others in his profession and millions of people across a soon to be liberated country, he played his role with finesse and with foresight. It was his singular devotion to the Bangladesh cause, his dedication to the task of seeing it reach fruition, that convinced Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman that Mustafa's was a voice that needed to speak for the country abroad. In Lebanon and then Iraq, the diplomat in Mustafa made a deep, necessary impression. There are yet people around who speak of the skills he employed as our ambassador in a region desirous of understanding Bangladesh a little deeper than it had till then.

Our tribute to K.G. Mustafa is, therefore, a recalling of the times and the values that defined the generation he belonged to. Mustafa believed in a higher purpose that underlined journalism. And he kept faith with that belief right till the end. And we are today left a good deal poorer by his passing.

Sheikh Hasina goes to China

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HARUN UR RASHID

THE proposed visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to China on March 17 is timely since the ties between the two countries have been characterised by comprehensive cooperation for the last 35 years of their diplomatic relation.

China is Bangladesh's neighbour over the Himalayas. Their interaction dates back by centuries. Apart from the two Chinese travellers -- Fa-Hien in the 4th century and Hue An-tung in the 7th century -- a Buddhist monk from Bangladesh, Atish Dipankar, traveled to China during the 11th century and preached Buddhism for 17 years. He died in modern day Chinese Tibet; the Chinese government returned the ashes to his native Munshiganj district and built a mausoleum there.

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Some of the geo-strategic realities in the region are:

- India and China have uneasy political relationship since their brief war in 1962, although economic interests are growing between them.
- China has been developing port facilities in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, and is planning to build railroad lines in Nepal, to link to Lhasa in Tibet.
- China reportedly has access to the Myanmar naval base in Hanggyi Island and established a monitoring station at Coco Island, north of India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands. China is also building a new port at Hambantota in southern Sri Lanka and Gwador in Baluchistan.
- These initiatives are irking India, whose government worries that China is expanding its sphere of regional influence by surrounding India with a "string of pearls" that could eventually undermine India's preeminence and potentially rise to an economic and

security threat.

- Militarisation in the Indian Ocean has added another dimension of security: Apart from the US, regional countries including India and China placed their navies to secure safety of sea-lanes and maritime resources.

Given the above realities, Bangladesh's geographical location is both an advantage and a limitation of the conduct of its foreign policy. Bangladesh has to play a delicate balancing act between the two Asian giants.

The fact that Sheikh Hasina's scheduled visit is preceded early this month by the Chinese Communist Party delegation's short trip to Dhaka indicates that China is interested in developing party-to-party relations without limiting it to the state level. The delegation called on the prime minister and also on Opposition Leader Begum Khaleda Zia.

Heads of successive Bangladesh governments have visited China since 1977. They concentrated on building economic and technical cooperation with China who responded generously, primarily in the sectors of infrastructure development, telecommunications, and energy. Defence cooperation has been developed and chiefs of armed services visited each other's countries.

China deeply appreciated Bangladesh's firm stand on the "One China" policy -- meaning no two Chinas, no independence to Taiwan and no representation of Taiwan in international organisations -- and support for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Chinese Foreign Minister Dr. Yang Jiechi visited Bangladesh in April 2008 and offered Tk.6 million in free aid to Bangladesh's development and Tk.5 million as a "token gift" to mark his visit. The two countries also signed an exchange of notes to construct the Bangladesh-China Exhibition Centre in Dhaka.

China has built six bridges in this country. The last bridge opened on February 18, 2008, over the Dhaleswari River, linking Dhaka with Munshiganj district.



The PM ponders her next move.

Bangladesh may seek funds for a second Padma bridge and a bridge over the Arial Khan River at Madaripur to link to the country's southwest.

Since China is an agent of robust economic growth, Bangladesh must take advantage of it and gradually integrate its economy with the Chinese economy. A chief mechanism is interconnectivity with multi-modal transport to China's Yunnan province through Myanmar. Furthermore, Bangladesh may link up to China through a railroad through Nepal.

In this respect, "the Kunming Initiative" was developed some years ago to interconnect Bangladesh, Myanmar and China. India's northeastern states may also join this plan to make the region an active economic hub.

Bangladesh will build a deep-sea port near Cox's Bazar. The prime minister offered regional countries, including China, the use of this deep-sea port. She demonstrates a vision of an inclusive, plural, and rapidly developing region of

interdependent economically developed countries playing their roles.

The Bangladesh prime minister's visit to India in January was closely watched by China. It appears that Bangladesh's support to India in the Joint Communiqué for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council was not comfortable for China because China did not support the council's reforms in 2004. Bangladesh needs all the diplomatic skills it can muster to remove whatever concerns China have in this respect.

Bangladesh foreign policy stands largely on two pillars: security and territorial security. Security not only refers to territorial security, but also water, food, energy, and environmental security. Initiatives for socio-economic development can only be made when all such sectors are attended to; China can help Bangladesh to achieve these goals.

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

The Pakistan case

Some Pakistanis are fearful that these are desperate times for US in Pakistan and desperation breeds dangerous behaviour. Though both Hillary Clinton and David Milliband expressed confidence that nuclear weapons are secure in military hands, the West have for long been anxious that these nuclear materials do not fall into the wrong hands.



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

IN Pakistan, terrorism has become an endless cycle. Consecutive suicide bombings in Peshawar, the bomb blast near Indian embassy at Kabul, and the Tehrik-e-Taliban attack on the army GHQ in Rawalpindi, one of the most sensitive places in Pakistan, raise questions on the effectiveness of military operations both in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Doubts on the effectiveness of military actions in Swat, Malakand, Waziristan, along with recent terrorist acts in Lahore, is causing serious concern. The Indo-Pak blame game continues unabated. The recently held Foreign Secretary talks between India and Pakistan, reportedly under US pressure, produced differing assessment by both the countries. Albeit, it strengthened India's image of seeking peaceful resolution of disputes with Pakistan.

There is a school of thought in Pakistan which states that the US perception of IS-militant collaboration is a result of India's

GHQ led US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to visit London to comment that the attack on GHQ underlined the extremist threat to Islamabad government "and the very important steps that the civilian leadership, along with the military, are taking to root out the extremists and prevent violence and direct assault on the sovereignty of the state."

Bruce Riedel views the attack as reflecting the volatility and fragility of politics in Pakistan. "The Taliban attackers demon-

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