

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

HC again upholds rule of law

Taher's place vindicated

THE highest court of justice has once again upheld the principle of due process of law. It has contributed also to set right a distortion of law and consequently of history. By its verdict Tuesday, it has once again brought to the fore how an illegal government can subvert the constitutional and due legal process of law by resorting to illegal means to fulfil its selfish ends.

We can draw a clear guideline from the HC verdict that any attempt at subverting the constitution and the due process of law ultimately boomerangs on the authors of such extralegal deeds. And the HC's judgement here has only brought to light the truth that those at the helm at that time had tried to bury under a deluge of lies.

Even earlier, the HC through another historic verdict provided guidance to the nation by invalidating usurpation of state power through extra-constitutional method and all acts derived from that illegitimate authority including martial law and whatever followed in exercise of that illegally acquired power. And this all goes to reiterate the truism that it is preposterous to expect any justice or good to follow from an authority devoid of any legal basis.

The illegal authority that grabbed state power at that time had through a travesty of trial in a fake military tribunal in 1976 had not only denied Col Taher justice, but also committed a judicial murder.

Through this HC verdict, therefore, the constitution has been strengthened and the rule of law upheld by exposing the farcical tribunal and the trial that made the vain attempt at robbing a patriot and freedom fighter of his due honour and place in history.

Now Col Taher's place in history has been restored in full glory.

Also think that this verdict greatly strengthens constitutional government and discredits military coups and grabbing of state power by ambitious generals. The present verdict along with the two previous ones should rid Bangladesh, for all times to come, any prospects of extra-constitutional adventure.

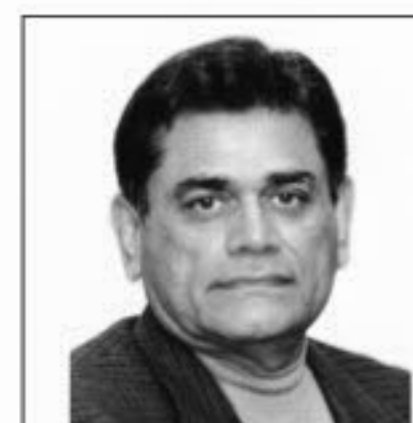
Ensuring safe drinking water

Issue calls for priority handling

AGAINST the backdrop of World Water Day, it is a good opportunity to dwell on the crisis that the citizens regularly face in terms of supply of pure drinking water. There is, first, the unplanned urbanisation putting water supply at risk for people as the basic amenity has not kept pace with expansion of the city.

And then comes the quality of water. With reports frequently coming in regarding contaminated water, even from the supply provided by WASA, just how endangered citizens' lives have become. We have been informed that people who inhabit the area around Rajarbagh police station have lately been queuing up at night for a bottle of potable water. The question is: what are the authorities at WASA doing to handle this problem? The argument WASA makes is that the river water that is purified before it can be supplied to citizens is so contaminated that it requires much more than the normal water treatment facilities. The point cannot be ignored and must be dealt with on a priority basis. The water of the Sitalakhya and the Meghna is at this point too tainted by the presence of algae and other elements, which requires huge efforts to be purified.

WASA officials would have us know that the bad odour in the water is the result of the treatment of the water and is safe for use. That is not convincing enough. It may be that the water is safe to drink, but can we blame people for staying away from it because they are put off by the smell of it? Measures are thus needed to ensure that the odour does not remain in the water. Finally, WASA tells us that it will take ten years for pure drinking water to be supplied to the urban areas. That period must be shortened, for obvious reasons.



Brig Gen
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IT is indeed a tangle that the UN has fallen into with regard to Libya, and the only certainty is the uncertain outcome of the many imponderables in the Libyan scenario. But to start with it seems that the UN has let go of an opportunity to play its due part by leaving the whole operation to "the Member States" entirely in its Resolution 1973 (2011).

UN's time in Libya had come and gone too. And it seems that the only responsibility of the UNSG was to see that a resolution of sorts was passed, and let the West, led by US, do the rest. And one is not surprised at the alacrity with which the western powers have pounced on Libya and Qaddafi.

The UN Resolution authorising "No-Fly Zone" over Libya comes with a caveat. While it authorises "Member States, acting nationally or through regional organisations or arrangements, to take all necessary measures to protect civilians under threat of attack in the country, including Benghazi," it has prohibited foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory. And this is this tangle that UN is likely to find itself in the very near future.

The Bangladesh government has most appropriately urged international troops to show restraint and resort to force "only when absolutely essential and solely for neutralising military targets" and has asserted the need for a dialogue within Libya to find a peaceful solution to the current crisis in keeping with the aspirations of the Libyan people.

Reportedly, French and British efforts to build support for a no-fly

zone over Libya had failed to win the backing of foreign ministers from the G8 countries who had met in Paris the previous week, where the consensus was that substantive action was needed to put pressure on Qaddafi, but military action was not an option.

And Germany was one of the sceptics who thought the imposition of a no-fly zone was not a good option; being aware of the need to "to avoid

down effect of the general flux gripping the region, and although there is strong resistance against Qaddafi he has a power base, particularly the army, that has helped strut him up, and that is what sets apart the situation in Libya and that of in Egypt and Tunisia. However, how long that will last is a matter of opinion.

Given that, the UN Resolution lays open a whole lot of questions, not

ians that were at stake. But merely bombing government installations will not deliver. It will only result in unnecessary casualties and might provoke Qaddafi to go against his opponents in a more drastic manner as he has promised to do. Can the US or British or Nato air operations provide a permanent shield from the air against ground movements of his troops?

Nobody will argue that the Libyan dictator needs to be prevented from turning on his own people, but that consideration has been motivated primarily by the compulsion for guaranteeing uninterrupted supply of Libyan oil to the West at all cost. And of course the "regime change" motivation is ever present although seldom uttered.

But the underlying motivations notwithstanding, one fails to understand how on earth the enforcing of the no-fly-zone can help protect the Libyans. Will taking "all actions necessary to protect civilians" as the UN Resolution of 17 March 2011 directs the Member States to do, translate into a ground action which the US is highly wary of considering, leave alone undertaking. And some commentators aver that, given the broad operating principles, "it can be assumed they intended that forces could intervene in Libya but could not remain in Libya after the intervention." It is difficult to make sense out of this.

And it is a lesson of history that counter air operation by itself is meaningless if not supported by ground operations. And the US does not have the stomach to go for a third front, at least at this point in time.

The question, what is the end game and how it will be played out, is one that the UNSG might find difficult to answer.

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any slippery slope" it did not want to get drawn in into a war in North Africa. But Resolution 1973 (2011) will come as relief to the anti-Qaddafi forces as much to the West, given that the air operations on Libya had managed to halt Qaddafi forces on the outskirts of Benghazi which is being held by them.

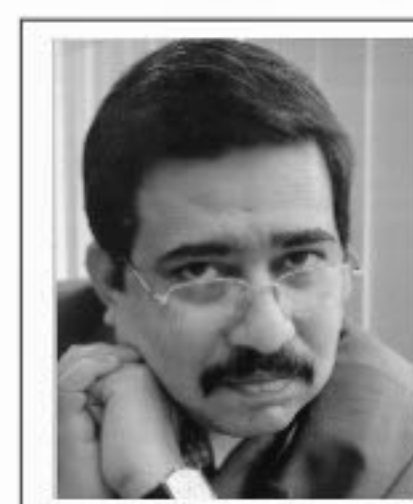
What has been happening in Libya over the last several weeks is a trickle

least of all, how do the member states go about meeting the provisions of Resolution 1973, the core responsibility of which is the protection of the civilian population that has been subjected to the severe retaliatory action by Qaddafi's forces. This has all the makings of a civil war.

Many might argue that there was no time to indulge in diplomacy and dialogue since it was the lives of civil-

THIRD EYE

Transforming agriculture



MAMUN RASHID

AS a student of social science, I was introduced to Bangladesh agriculture, its fundamentals and challenges in the mid-seventies. Economics studies at the university helped me to appreciate the productivity improvement, agriculture marketing, storage and land reform issues better in the early eighties. The Bangladesh Television programme "Mati O Manush," where I was engaged in background information and research in the mid-eighties, showed me the ground realities.

My interactions with those who matter in Bangladesh agriculture, like former secretary and adviser AMM Shawkat Ali, former finance secretary and adviser Akbar Ali Khan, leading agriculture economist and Brac executive director Mahabub Hossain, Bangladesh Krishi Bank former Managing Director and now Chairman, Ibrahim Khaled, and the most passionate driver of changes in Bangladesh agriculture and present agriculture minister Ms. Matia Chowdhury, apart from several field visits organised by many NGOs/MFIs, helped me a lot to understand the basic dynamics, priorities and challenges in agriculture.

Agriculture is the key economic activity in Bangladesh, which contributes 20% of the gross domestic product (GDP) and employs around 48% of the total labour force. It is related to issues like food and nutritional security, income generation and poverty reduction. Improvement in agricultural sector performance is therefore extremely important for overall economic growth of Bangladesh. The chashas (farmers) have become the most critical success factor of Bangladesh politics and its future.

It is true that agriculture has progressed a lot over the years. Rice production, which was 11 million tonnes in the early seventies, reached 34 million tonnes in 2010. Agricultural land has decreased, but innovation and application of high yield variety seeds and farming have kept us not only floating but also moving forward. Added to this was the success of the agriculture ministry, agriculture extension department, block supervisors, NGO/MFIs, increasing focus from media and above all our ever trying farmers. Non-farm activities, fisheries, poultry, food processing, food storage and over all agriculture business have increased many-fold.

The recent government step to open almost 18 million farmers' account with state owned commer-

cial and specialised banks (almost 13 million already opened) to reach input subsidy to producers will no doubt bring further success in our journey towards financial inclusion. Knowing Indonesia and Philippines experiences, I would like to pay my standing ovation to Ms. Matia Chowdhury and Governor Atiur Rahman for this.

However, in order to keep our increasing population fed and to protect them from the onslaught of international price hike, we need to increase our focus on agriculture. Farmers' issues must be heard, discussed and mainstreamed. NGO/MFI linkages must be strengthened to train our small and marginal farmers on better usage of inputs, productivity improvement, cooperative lending

and output marketing. The government can establish an Agriculture Foundation like PKSF or IDCOL to cater to the emerging needs of the agriculture sector and encourage public-private partnership in agriculture. No government should ever think of interest or principal waivers for agriculture loans. The interest rate regime must be restructured. The problem in Bangladesh agriculture is with availability of credit, not the interest rate. The success in banking sector reform should be replicated by Bangladesh Krishi Bank (BKB) and Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (RAKUB). Development partners should be hooked in to develop a sustainable agriculture output storage and marketing model.

The inadequate infrastructural

We need to take our agriculture seriously, help the farmers to improve their productivity, and proceed with high breed research and cultivation. The farmers should also be given the right price to keep them in business.

facilities limit agricultural production. Farmers complain about power shortages and inadequate and costly transportation system. There is a fairly good network of roads but the railway network is still discouraging. Water shortage is also severe. The estimated demand for agriculture credit is Tk.22,500 crores. Bangladesh Bank has budgeted Tk.12,000 crores agri-loan disbursement in 2011. We need to encourage other operators like MFIs and private sector operators to fill in the gaps.

Land price increase has increased the security value and repayment capability of the farmers. If farming land can be used efficiently, the yield will increase. There is a growing need for mechanisation, which necessitates more power tillers or tractors

and needs term financing of 3-5 years. Lease in farming lands, in view of the rise in price, also necessitates term financing. Contract farming may also be a remedy. Here, usually, the farmer agrees to provide specific quantities of an agricultural product, meeting the quality standards and delivery schedule set by the purchaser. In turn, the buyer commits to purchase the product, often at a pre-determined price. In some cases the buyer also commits to support production through, for example, supplying farm inputs, land preparation, providing technical advice and arranging transport of produce to the buyers' premises.

However, if the terms of the contract are not respected by one of the contracting parties, then the other party loses. We need to further ring fence this through necessary legal reform.

There is no insurance for farmers against natural calamities like flood and drought. Every year, farmers face huge losses because of this. In many countries, there is crop insurance that acts as incentive to farmers for using capital intensive technology in production. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) has suggested insurance systems for farmers. We can also develop a risk coverage fund. Mobile banking services may also be used to facilitate quick transactions between the lenders and farmers.

Meeting the nation's food requirements remains the key-objective of the government. We need to take our agriculture seriously, help the farmers to improve their productivity, and proceed with high breed research and cultivation. The farmers should also be given the right price to keep them in business.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 24

- 1401**
Turko-Mongol emperor Timur sacks Damascus.
- 1896**
A. A. Popov makes the first radio signal transmission in history.
- 1956**
King convicted for bus boycott. Civil rights leader, the Reverend Martin Luther King, has been convicted of organising an illegal boycott by black passengers of buses in the US state of Alabama.
- 1971**
Pakistan Army opens fire on Bengali demonstrators in Syedpur, Rangpur and Chittagong. A large number of people are killed.
- 1972**
The United Kingdom imposes direct rule over Northern Ireland.
- 1976**
In Argentina, the armed forces overthrow the constitutional government of President Isabel Perón and start a 7-year dictatorial period self-styled the National Reorganization Process. Since 2006, a public holiday known as Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice is held on this day.
- 1999**
Kosovo War: NATO commences air bombardment against Yugoslavia, marking the first time NATO has attacked a sovereign country.
- 2003**
The Arab League votes 21-1 in favour of a resolution demanding the immediate and unconditional removal of U.S. and British soldiers from Iraq.
- 2008**
Bhutan officially becomes a democracy, with its first ever general election.