

STRAIGHT LINE

Meghna launch accident

Govt needs to increase monitoring

THURSDAY'S motor launch accident in Meghna river in Brahmanbaria is yet another instance of utter callousness of the river vessel operators towards human life.

We are deeply shocked at the loss of so many lives (33 by latest count) and convey our heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved families.

The circumstances of the foundering of MV Bipasha bound for Jamalganj from Bhairab at Char Kakoria after it hit a sunken stone-laden trawler follow a very familiar pattern. The number of passengers the launch was carrying was more than its capacity. It was plying at night, though, given its age- it was about 30 years old- it should have operated only during daytime.

What should baffle any observer is that the fated launch blindly crashed against the submerged trawler. Was there no marker showing the location of the sunken trawler as a warning to other vessels plying that particular river route?

Evidently, there was no proper monitoring by the river transport authority in place. Which is why, the launch operators could flout the rules so easily. So, the responsibility for the unnatural death of so many people goes both to the operators of the vessel and the monitoring department of the river transport authority.

This latest launch tragedy only adds to some 535 mishaps that occurred between 1985 and 2010, according to a survey. The government even formed some 863 committees to probe the accidents during that period. Recommendations like increasing the number of ship surveyors and inspectors, monitoring of fitness-checking procedure, formation of river police and waterway safety committee, etc were also made by those probe bodies. So far, no progress has been made to implement those recommendations.

The government has now formed a probe committee to look into the latest launch mishap. We hope it will be able to identify the causes of the mishap and arrange for bringing those to blame to justice.

The government should now lay more emphasis on putting a proper river vessel monitoring system in place as well as implement other recommendations from previous probe bodies to avert future launch tragedies.

Expatriate bank in operation

Efficiency and honesty will be crucial

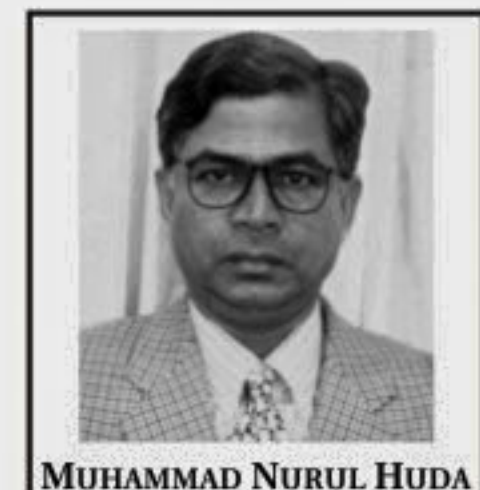
Along overdue step has at last been taken. We commend the government for delivering on a promise that seemed consigned to back burner. Happily, it has kicked off with a paid up capital of Tk 100 crore which for the tasks it has set itself sounds rather meagre. A lion's share of the initial capital comes from the expatriate welfare fund.

The specialised fund is to serve three purposes: one, it will extend loan to workers obtaining jobs to migrate to their place of work with the job serving as collateral. Two, the bank through its branches in Bangladeshi manpower recipient countries will help channeling remittances of the workers to their relatives in Bangladesh. Aside from these two functions, the bank has plans to provide loans to expatriate workers to enable them to set up business at home on return.

Like any other bank it will function and grow depending on the deposits by the subscribers. Let's not forget that the rationale behind setting up this bank is to save the intending migrant workers from the clutches of money lenders or obviating the need to sell landed property to procure travel and visa-related funds. They fall an easy prey to deception and exploitation both at home and in host countries due to their helplessness and inherent vulnerabilities. This is where we think the bank should be more focused rather than on channeling remittances although quite understandably that is also the service the workers should like to utilise for safe remittance.

In other words, we want the bank headquarters in Dhaka to be really dynamic in providing loans to intending migrants to enable them to join their posts. Of course, the sooner the Expatriate Bank opens the required number of branches abroad and its capital swells in keeping with demands for funds, the better it will be. The bank would need to be provided with properly qualified hands who must also be honest, sincere and competent to do a good job of

The counter-productive exasperation



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THIS writer has no observation on the apparently unbridled utterances of senior politicians because the citizens of the country and perhaps the court of law would pronounce their judgments at an appropriate time. However, it is pertinent to take issue with the alleged utterance of the share probe committee chief, who is a distinguished senior banker and a public servant in his own right.

The chief enquirer, Mr. Ibrahim Khaled, Chairman, Krishi Bank makes some interesting observations when in the same breath he says that suspected persons have not done anything beyond the law but have acted immorally for which their actions are not culpable. The problem on ground is that the innumerable victims of share scam are not interested in seeing the fine distinction between immorality and illegality. They along with many others want corrective action, and if that is not coming as feared then Mr. Ibrahim Khaled's helplessness is of no concern to anybody.

When the probe committee chief says that in our criminal justice system the dice is loaded in favour of the accused, he is not far from the reality. This has been so on account of our jurisprudence wherein the accused have to be afforded all protection and safeguards and can only be punished when found guilty beyond the least shadow of doubt.

The above brings us to the vexed issue of the co-existence of civil liberties with criminal investigation efficiency. One may ask if investigative efficiency has to be sacrificed at the altar of civil liberties? All right-

thinking persons would, however, say that civil liberties are paramount in a democratic society and all concerned have to make necessary adjustments towards ensuring the civil liberty.

Under the circumstances it would not serve any productive purpose by pointing accusing fingers at suspects who have morally transgressed but

and moderating actors, namely the Security and Exchange Commission and the central bank in the share market transaction. The question is, has the statutory regulatory body of SEC exercised due diligence? Have the commercial banks operated in the capital market beyond the permissible limit set by the central bank? The

affected many individuals and families. Their simmering discontent may take an ominous turn towards socio-economic dislocation due to the machinations of dubious elements. Before that happens, the regulatory bodies should sharpen and activate their supervisory claws to arrest the avarice of high and mighty predators.

Under the circumstances it would not serve any productive purpose by pointing accusing fingers at suspects who have morally transgressed but are not legally culpable.



WAHID ADNAN / DRINKNEWS

are not legally culpable. In particular, the players in the share scam are high and mighty and one needs the teeth to bite them.

There are indeed two balancing

suspected omissions and commissions of responsible persons in these two bodies should constitute culpable negligence of some measure.

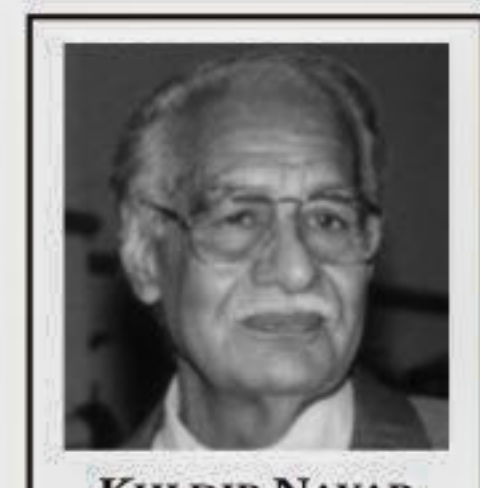
The share scam has adversely

It is time to skilfully operate within law. The fight is one of brain over brawn.

The writer is a columnist for The Daily Star.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Pak, Bangla still stand apart



KULDIP NAYAR

VISITING Pakistan and Bangladesh within a span of 14 days is like harking back the 40 years when the two countries separated from each other. Why did it happen? How did it happen? Who was responsible for it? Such an exercise can only be of academic distraction. But it is clear that the disputes between the Bengalis in East Pakistan and those living in West Pakistan had become so acute towards the end of the sixties that their parting of ways had become inevitable.

I was at Islamabad in the end of March and at Dhaka in mid-April. What I have seen in both the countries underlines my earlier belief that the two peoples are so different in their thinking and approach that they could not have lived together as one country. Both are proud to be Muslim. Yet, the Islam practiced in Bangladesh is liberal and accommodating. The demagogues are there. But they do not disturb the rhythm of life, which is pluralistic.

Text books in Bangladesh teach history. They do not distort it or preach enmity as the books in Pakistan do. A Hindu is not considered an enemy in Bangladesh. Even the liberation war 1971 has been told in a historical perspective without chauvinism and vengeful note. Bengali, the national language which was sought to be replaced by Islamabad with Urdu and ultimately led to the secession of East Pakistan, has given birth to a different culture, tethered to Islam but not to parochialism. Urdu does not figure anywhere. Signboards are mostly in English and at very few places in Bangla and English.

Dance, music and art are galloping freely. They do not have to conform to a particular way or style. It is an art

for the sake of art. Rabindranath Tagore is as much popular and loved as Qazi Nazarul Islam, the poet laureate of Bangladesh. Kathak and Odissi, the two types of dance in Bangladesh, are not discouraged because they have the Hindu orientation. Nothing in dance or music is banned so long as they are in realm of art. Women wear no hijab and very few men keep long beards. And there is no law of blasphemy, not even a murmur of demand.

Pakistan has many liberals. But they are afraid to speak out and be counted. The assassination of Punjab governor Salman Taseer and Cultural Minister Shahbaz Bhatti has muffled

support from the government, something which I cannot say for certain after my recent visit to Pakistan. But then East Pakistan was always more liberal than West Pakistan and was even considered close to Hindus. A Bangladeshi intellectual explained to me how their separation from Pakistan took away from that society liberalism and the sense of accommodation, leaving the country to wallow in extremism and prejudice.

Bangladesh founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman told me in 1972, when I interviewed him at Dhaka: "All along Pakistan has preached four things: one, Islam is in danger; two, the Hindu is kaafir; three, India is the

like the youth in India towards Pakistan.

What Islamabad does or does not has little effect on relations between India and Bangladesh. New Delhi is responsible for it. Dhaka has practically done everything which the accord between the two countries laid down. It has given the transit facilities to enable northeastern states to have better and quicker connectivity with the rest of India. Yet the much-publicised loan of \$1 billion has not come through.

Indian officials blame the Bangladesh government for not providing the Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) which the banks demand before releasing loan. I have been assured that the DPRs have reached India and that the loan will be released within the next few days.

However, the better news for Bangladesh would be free trade. I have never been able to understand why New Delhi drags its feet when it comes to trade with Bangladesh or, for that matter, Pakistan. Duty free trade with them would make little difference to the imports worth billions of dollars. The two countries can gain from the huge market India has. This would create vested interests in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Sheikh Hasina is anxiously awaiting the visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The signing of Teesta River agreement is expected. But more than that Hasina hopes to shore up her sagging popularity through the agreement and other goodies. I hope she turns out to be correct. But my experience is that India is too squeamish when it comes to dealing with the neighbouring countries. New Delhi is yet to learn the art of diplomacy.

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the voice of critics. Hafiz Syeed, leader of Lashkar-e-Toiba, talking in terms of jihad against India, makes news. A person like him does not cause even a ripple in Bangladesh. The Jamaat-e-Islami here tries to muddy the water of secularism but without much effect.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has many negative traits. But her relentless fight against communal forces is her positive contribution to the ethos of Bangladesh. The government, unlike at Islamabad, shows no quarters to religious forces meddling in the affairs of the state or society. Founder of Pakistan Qaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah had also advised the Pakistanis to adopt a similar path. But his untimely death changed the course.

Terrorists have no direct or indirect

enemy; and four, Kashmir must be conquered. The Pakistanis have been fed on this propaganda for the last many years. The hate campaign unleashed in that country is even against the tenets of Islam. Unless there is a change in the mentality of the people of Pakistan they cannot get out of their make-believe world."

Yet I found a streak of sympathy for Pakistan. Many used the word "pity." I believe that an overwhelming majority in Bangladesh feels that the Pakistanis face a situation which requires understanding and help. Bangladesh has neither forgotten nor forgiven the atrocities committed against their nationals in 1971. But that does not stop some nostalgically recalling the period when the two lived together. The younger generation is indifferent,

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 23

1815
The Second Serbian Uprising - a second phase of the national revolution of the Serbs against the Ottoman Empire, erupts shortly after the annexation of the country to the Ottoman Empire.

1920
The national council in Turkey denounces the government of Sultan Mehmed VI and announces a temporary constitution.

1941
World War II: The Greek government and King George II evacuate Athens before the invading Wehrmacht.

1942
World War II: Baedeker Blitz - German bombers hit Exeter, Bath and York in retaliation for the British raid on Lübeck.

1948
1948 Arab-Israeli War: Haifa, a major port of Israel, is captured from Arab forces.

1968
Vietnam War: Student protesters at Columbia University in New York City take over administration buildings and shut down the university.

1993
Eritreans vote overwhelmingly for independence from Ethiopia in a United Nations-monitored referendum.