

Rajuk filling up the Balu

River grabbing by state agency!

WE must thank the Department of Environment (DoE) for acting promptly on the report of The Daily Star regarding the damage done to the Balu. But we feel that it should have acted sooner. The river had already become clogged and un-navigable due to unabated encroachment and pollution. And RAJUK has caused constriction of its width by filling up the banks in order to construct a bridge over it under a project that did not have the approval of the BIWTA.

Although the project has been stopped, but what is inexplicable is the fact that the DoE was prompted to act only by the Star's report when a good part of the project had already been completed and substantial damage to the river done as a result.

The RAJUK, the DoE, and the BIWTA owe an explanation to clarify a few things. One wonders how come a project that had not been cleared by the BIWTA could have been proceeded with, and what was RAJUK's compulsion to go ahead with an unapproved scheme. And how it is that none of the relevant agencies had noticed the construction work in the last three years, the project having commenced in 2008 and was due for completion next year?

Regrettably, in spite of the government's declared policy with regards to protection of the rivers, and the very strong commitment of the PM herself to the issue, and the seminal 12-point formula by the highest judiciary in this matter, river grabbing goes on unabated. In this case the grabber happens to be a government agency that seems to care little for government or judicial instructions.

While one must laud government decisions regarding protection of the rivers and the environment, their implementation has been lamentably poor. And the latest instance has exposed a serious failure of governance too. While we, *The Daily Star*, have been waging, a relentless struggle, and will continue to do so to save the rivers, it would be advisable for the government not to wait for the media but to be more proactive and gear up its own oversight mechanism to nab the grabbers before they can cause serious damage.

Safety net schemes

Impact assessment necessary

THE All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on the ultra-poor focusing on the upcoming budget has brought up an important agenda. Chairman of the APPG Saber Hossain Chowdhury highlighted the need for an assessment of the impact of the expenditure incurred in the safety net programmes that were taken up in the financial year which is about to end. Given that 84 such programmes were in operation with budgetary allocations amounting to Tk. 19.497 crore (being 15 percent of the national budget) the questions of monitoring how the money was spent and with what results certainly assumes critical importance.

We don't know whether concerns were formally raised as part of the quarterly and mid-term appraisal of the budget's implementation. That would have been the ideal thing to do to change gears in time, if it were needed. But we may not have missed the bus altogether, there is still some time left to carry out an impact assessment. We must go about it immediately to develop a strategy or strategies keeping in view the pitfalls of the outgoing year to avert them in the next.

The criteria for assessment should be (a) whether the target beneficiaries were selected on the basis of their need or a partisan angle was taken; (b) whether there was pilferage and corruption; (c) if so, what steps were taken to hold the responsible to account; and (d) were these programmes location-specific and time-bound? For all we know, much of it was not meant to be a dole so that it is worthwhile to probe the extent of physical targets met.

Finally, we fully endorse the idea of creating a centralised database of the ultra-poor and specific programmes so far undertaken for them to keep a tab on the goings-on and make timely intervention and correction. Also finally, it makes strategic sense to have an integrated approach under the government and NGOs to make a definite impact on poverty.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 7

1429

Joan of Arc ends the Siege of Orléans, pulling an arrow from her own shoulder and returning, wounded, to lead the final charge. The victory marks a turning point in the Hundred Years' War.

1920

Treaty of Moscow: Soviet Russia recognizes the independence of the Democratic Republic of Georgia only to invade the country six months later.

1945

World War II: General Alfred Jodl signs unconditional surrender terms at Reims, France, ending Germany's participation in the war. The document takes effect the next day.

1954

Indochina War: The Battle of Dien Bien Phu ends in a French defeat (the battle began on March 13).

2000

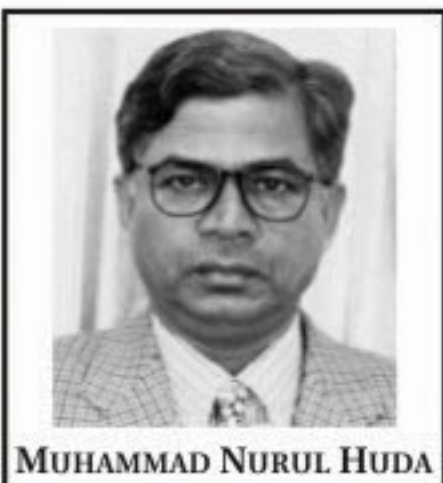
Vladimir Putin is inaugurated president of Russia

2008

Dmitry Medvedev is sworn in as Russia's president.

STRAIGHT LINE

Police frailties in societal prism



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

WHILE commenting on the country's socio-political scenario, a learned contributor to *The Daily Star* poignantly remarks that if one recognises the shabbiness of our public life, the frailties of policing ethics inclusive, one would get a potent recipe for cynicism, alienation and despair. The write-up ("It's a national affront," *The Daily Star*, April 28) very pertinently adds that for one to get it into perspective, the situation has to be viewed through the prism of the society.

The above writer is directly on spot when he says that with increasing insecurity, people want to see the visible presence of authority more and more in public places. He displays raw pragmatism when he says that interference from above remains a sore point, besides the other irritants the police face in the discharge of day-to-day duties. In addition there is admirable candour in his observation when he says that "we must not deflect from the fact that the police as the vital law enforcement agency deservedly claim a high status."

The writer impresses upon shunning the blame culture that has so infamously distorted our political landscape, for ensuring fair and just law and order operation. He hopes that there would be a beginning of the end of the trust-deficit of our political culture to which our people have remained privy since long, much to the detriment of the nation's progress.

While agreeing with the timely and appropriate views of the above mentioned writer with regard to policing, this scribe would add that the inherited colonial system has been expanded and strengthened but continues to perform its repressive role and political surveillance functions at the cost of its proper role.

Some say that internal incentives do



TQBAK AHMED/ DRK NEWS

The role of intelligence agencies needs to be redefined to protect the fundamental right to freedom of association, expression and movement. There should be a review of the authoritarian powers of police that are manifestly antithetical to the democratic spirit.

not exist to professionalise the service, insulate it from group conflicts in society and enable it to act in a non-partisan manner. Further, the police work on severely inadequate pay at lower levels and are corrupt in many tiers.

Some experts opine that the politicians do not want to professionalise the police service because control over it is central to political conflict in a divided society. Such experts comment that although our polity adopted a written liberal democratic constitution, it did not feel any unease in retaining the colonial administrative, police and judicial structures. There were almost no pressures to recast the system to meet the changed situation.

Under above circumstances, the colonial-repressive character of our police remained because the governing elite of a supposedly decolonised soci-

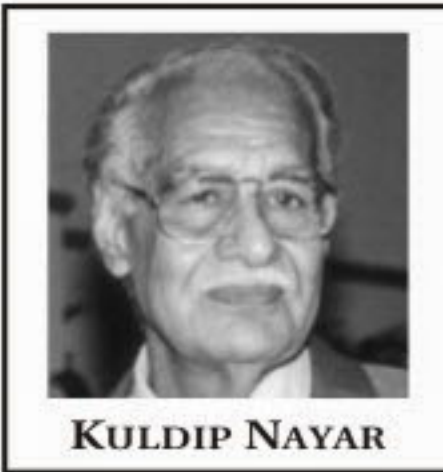
ety willingly retained the inherited organisation by ignoring justified demands for change. In effect, our system displays a relationship of control, coercion and surveillance over a subordinate population.

A police structure partly military and partly civil within a single organisation became the basic structure of the Indian police system. By mid-1930s, police coercion became a vital instrument of state policy. For the British Raj, crime and politics were inseparable; defiance of state authority was a serious crime and a prelude to rebellion, and therefore, political resistance was a crime or a likely occasion for crime. The political purpose behind the origin of Indian Police needs to be understood.

The question is, have our political leaders, who occupied positions of power after the departure of the alien rulers, remained enamoured by the

BETWEEN THE LINES

Few options before Pakistan



KULDEEP NAYAR

ISLAMABAD is damned both ways: whether it admits to its hand in the US operation which killed Osama bin Laden or it says that it did not know that he was living at Abbotabad, close to Pakistan's military academy. The first option may evoke an anti-Pakistan storm within and outside the country because Osama had come to represent anti-American sentiment among most Muslims. At present, people's mood is sullen but not evocative.

The second option will be taken with a pinch of salt. Not many are willing to trust Islamabad that it was not aware of Osama, his wives and 13 children living in a mansion in the heart of Pakistan for the last five years. America's anti-terrorism chief has already asked Pakistan to prove that it did not know of Osama's whereabouts. He has alleged that there was a supportive terrorist network which needed to be exposed.

For the world, it is a serious matter which Islamabad must attend to in a serious manner. It would be difficult to sell what the Pakistan envoy to US has said: Pakistan is making inquiries how Osama came to Abbotabad and lived without the authorities knowing it. Different voices from different places to explain may not do. Without a valid explanation, Pakistan would find itself in a tighter position as the days go by.

My inference is that top circles in the Pakistan establishment knew about Osama's stay at this place. One allegation is that the ISI had built the huge mansion for him. It must be very large because four US helicopters ultimately landed in the compound. But whoever built Osama's residence, the fact of its existence cannot be denied.

True, Pakistan's sovereignty has been violated as former President General Pervez Musharraf has said. But

American commandoes, numbering 3,000, have been operating in Pakistan for many years. The four helicopters which conducted the operation flew from Ghazi, the Pakistan territory where US has an airbase. Islamabad should not have allowed the Americans to enter from day one. My fear is that much more trouble is in store for Pakistan because Washington is determined to use it for its war in Afghanistan.

Whatever the rhetoric, I do not buy the argument that Pakistan knew about the operation. Islamabad is spreading this information even through its foreign missions that it knew about it and

has killed some 4,000 Pakistani soldiers and nearly 40,000 civilians. Therefore, according to him, Pakistan was justified in letting the US operation take place without any challenge. He announced that they would continue to support the Taliban. This is apparently borne out of hope that the Taliban should come back to rule Afghanistan and give Pakistan the vicarious satisfaction of having the strategic depth.

Washington may gloat over the elimination of Osama. Secretary of State Hillary said: "This is America and what it decides it carries out." She should realise that Osama emerged because he was able to harness the hurt of Muslims

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connived at the whole operation. This is not true. America did not trust Pakistan on the operation in any manner because it had burnt its fingers earlier.

A couple of times US had pinpointed Osama's hideout and communicated it to Islamabad before carrying out the operation. But all the times it turned out that Osama had left the hideout at the eleventh hour. The US State Department has openly said that Pakistan was not kept in the "loop." It was entirely a US operation from the beginning till the end.

Pakistan may feel embarrassed over the statements by some top military echelons and former retired foreign service hands. One air marshal said on one Indian TV network that Islamabad supported the US operation, but did not want to admit it because they were still in the midst of a war against the al-Qaeda.

A foreign service hand said that they wanted to punish the al-Qaeda which

who have felt America's interference in their internal affairs. His elimination may ultimately end al-Qaeda. But some other al-Qaeda will come up. Taliban are already thereto garner opinion against the US and the West which look anti-Islam in their policies to the Muslims.

Terrorism, they generally believe, is the term that has been tagged to them to give them a bad name. America and the West have to seriously consider how to allay their fears. President Obama tried to reach out to Muslims at Cairo but the words he used have turned out to be empty. Muslims expect him to give a concrete shape to the sentiments he had expressed to prove his credibility.

When America emerged victorious in the Cold War after defeating the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, the West believed that it had ended the ideology of communism. But this is not true because the expressions against globalisation may not have got coherence and the

administrative and police system and enjoyed exercising power and authority, oblivious of their own demand for far-reaching administrative reforms?

A worrying thought is, are we witnessing a scenario in which both the public and police are caught in an increasingly norm-free, unpredictable and unjust environment? Is policing being transformed from the professional imposition of a coherent moral consensus on society into an intensely partisan political activity?

In order to render our police into a service organisation, we have to look at the Police Act 1861, that prioritises collection and communication of intelligence affecting the public peace. Our penal code prioritises offences against the state and the maintenance of public order. The procedural code begins with the arrest of persons and maintenance of public order and tranquility before investigation and trial.

It is time to acknowledge that we have failed to introduce administrative changes in tune with the provisions of our republican constitution. The police largely remains in its colonial mould. It would be pragmatic to appreciate that the blanket power of superintendence vested in the political government by the Police Act 1861 is not appropriate in a democracy.

The role of intelligence agencies needs to be redefined to protect the fundamental right to freedom of association, expression and movement. There should be a review of the authoritarian powers of police that are manifestly antithetical to the democratic spirit.

The spectre of unregulated political intervention in police work has to stop. While intervention is inevitable and necessary to some extent there is an imperative need to specify where government interference is justified and where it is not. The issue of setting up a security/safety commission to ensure police operational autonomy deserves serious attention.

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channel to ventilate them. But they are there in every country to be seen.

Similarly, the al-Qaeda may end but as an ideology it will appear in some other shape in some other countries. In fact, the Lakshar-e-Toibba is an offshoot of the al-Qaeda philosophy. The root cause is the grievance. Unless that is tackled, the fertile ground for any group or a bunch of people to come up and disturb the peace will always be there.

India's response was along the expected lines. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that the whole incident proved that Pakistan was a haven for terrorists. He termed bin Laden's death a "significant step forward," and hoped that it would deal a decisive blow to the al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups.

Home Minister P. Chidambaram hoped that the embarrassment would now compel Islamabad to effectively prosecute those involved in the 26/11 Mumbai terrorists attack. Of course, this will be the litmus test to judge Pakistan's keenness to pursue the Mumbai terrorists.

Yet, I wish our reaction had been more considerate. We should have talked about joint action against terrorists in the entire region and proposed a common ground. Of course, it is known that there are some elements in Pakistan operating against India with the connivance of Islamabad. A joint operation will eliminate official assistance, if there is any.

At this time when both the countries are in the midst of a positive dialogue a proposal of joint operation would have gone down well. People in Pakistan, brainwashed to hate India, would have seen a gesture from Delhi as a step to help Pakistan when it needs the help most. It would have also given the impression that its own government was in the wrong and not India. This is how normal conditions can be created for a sturdy friendship.

The writer is an eminent Indian Columnist.