

ENIGMATTERS

Aug 21 grenade attack case

The trial should be transparent

ONE can assume that with the submission of supplementary charge-sheets of the August 21 grenade attack case, the process of investigation has ended and the trial would commence soon. It has consumed nearly seven years for the investigation, into what was perhaps the most blatant act of violence in recent history of Bangladesh, to be completed. It has taken fourteen extensions, before the CID could submit the supplementary charge sheets accusing 30 new persons of involvement with the dastardly attack.

However, what we are concerned most about is the comment of the Metropolitan Public Prosecutor that the investigation has found evidence that the attack was planned and conducted in collaboration with some militant organisations, the party office of the then prime minister, and in which the administration played a collusive role. The supplementary charge-sheets include, among others, names of many political personalities belonging to the senior BNP ranks and retired military and police officers holding senior posts during that time.

The attack on the AL meeting on August 21 2004 was unlike any other bomb or grenade attack, whose possible impact, had it succeeded, God forbid, in taking out the intended targets, we shudder even to contemplate. One recalls with a sense of abhorrence how the course of investigation was sought to be diverted, and how persons with the remotest connection with the incident were roped in, to, as one can assume, hide the real perpetrators and the planners of the attack, during the erstwhile 4-party regime.

The BNP has made this into a political issue, terming the charge-sheets as an attempt to defile the Zia -- family image. We are not surprised at the reaction of the BNP. Given the nature of the family centric politics in Bangladesh, such reactions are only but natural. But, while we do not want to comment on the accused, we insist on the need for a transparent trial where the result of the investigation is established through incontrovertible evidence, all the more so because the nation would like to know the real brain behind a most condemnable act that took the lives of 24 besides injuring hundreds others.

SWAN conference

Women's role indispensable for a green economy

THE conference of South Asian Women's Network (SWAN) which ended recently with the Dhaka Declaration has called for peace and a green economy, highlighting the role of women in South Asia in establishing both. For this, however -- as was pointed out by the participants at the two-day conference -- women must have equal access to resources and a greater role in development policy-making.

Women have an unequal share of the world's resources and relatively few are to be found at the policy-making level. According to a UN study in 2000, women do 60% of the world's work, make 10% of the world's income and own 1% of the world's property. Yet, the fact that women influence some 85% choices of consumer products goes to show their influence on the economy.

While privatisation and commoditisation have been inevitable features of capitalist economies, a line must be drawn between profit-making and the destruction of nature and its resources. Women's knowledge, skills and best practices, such as that of growing indigenous crops, fruits and vegetables as opposed to the mono-crop culture can save nature as well as the economy more than technology and artificial methods of production can.

Security and human rights of women themselves were also issues raised at the conference, and, while Afghanistan is a country of key concern, in Bangladesh too, women's rights -- despite several progressive policies and even bigger promises -- are yet to be realised. Without protecting the rights and security of half the world's population, security of nature and the economy can hardly be ensured.

SWAN has called for green ways of economy that are "diverse, decentralised and a path of empowerment for all". We hope that the call and pledge will be realised beyond the declaration and incorporated in development policy around the world for a greener economy, sustainable environment and more secure future for our

'Off the record' remarks, a lesson for both



MOHAMMAD ALI SATTAR

THE denigrating comment by the Indian Prime Minister on Bangladesh come as a shocker and leaves everyone

astounded, came as it did from a person who is regarded with high esteem in many quarters in this country. His education and economic knowledge is beyond question, but his statesmanship and politics has been a matter of concern even within the Indian ruling alliance.

During a 100-minute interaction with five editors in New Delhi last Wednesday, the Prime Minister quite assertively fielded questions on a wide range of issues. During the talk, the Indian premier made some disquieting observations about Bangladesh politics and its people. He said, "we must reckon that at least 25% of the population of Bangladesh swears by the Jamaat-e-Islami and they are very much anti Indian. The Jamaat is in the clutches of the ISI many times. So the political landscape in Bangladesh can change at any time".

Since it came from the Prime Minister himself it cannot be based on his subjective judgment. It cannot be a frivolity or a passing remark. Unfortunately, the information (25% people support Jammata) passed on to the Prime Minister is wrong and appears motivated. It's a result of miscalculated reckoning of Bangladesh people and politics. It's a good example of a bad intelligence job.

The Indian government has subsequently removed all references to Bangladesh in Manmohan Singh's observation from its website.

The clarification effort makes it more interesting. PM's media adviser Harish Khare was quoted by the Indian Express as saying, "The PM's remark was off-the-record. We put it out by mistake. It has been corrected now." An official spokesperson of the external affairs ministry said in New Delhi that these remarks were by no means intended to be judgmental.

The Indian High Commission in Dhaka has also issued a media release clarifying the Indian government position regarding the PM's remark.

Even if it was off-the-record, his remarks indicate that he is out of touch with or simply ignorant about the actual state of Bangladesh politics. Moreover, off the record statements give way to serious misgivings.

We are perturbed because it is about the people. Even if 25% people of the country were supporters of Jamaate Islami (actually it is no more than 6 percent), why would India or Mr. Singh be concerned? People have the right to decide their political doctrines. BJP is a proven hard-core communal party, should we in Bangladesh feel threatened if the party comes to power in India? Or must our leaders castigate the BJP supporters in India?

We are concerned also because the PM has commented on the possibility of change in the political landscape of Bangladesh. He hinted at the activities

of 'the terrorist elements' (Jamaat-ISI links) which, he believes, have a sway over the Jammata Islami elements in Bangladesh. If India felt Bangladesh was in danger, it should make it known to the Bangladesh government.

Let it be known that people of this land have been acknowledged for their simplicity and resilience for centuries. They have shown great perseverance during all the historical periods that they lived through. They fought the British and Pakistan colonial rulers. It was through a long struggle that Bangladesh was born.

They always chose the right path.

Our politics is not communal. We have voted for secularism. We are a nascent democracy striving to set up a durable political system. We have faith based parties but we don't entertain extremism. We enjoy a tranquil religious atmosphere. We are politically forbearing.

One more time we are forced to believe that India's attitude towards Bangladesh has not changed. It has always looked upon us a weak and unstable neighbour. India has made it known many times over the last forty years about its choice of party and government here.

In spite of being at the receiving end, we are constantly working towards having friendly relations with our bigger neighbour. We tried our best to respond to India's concern. The list of engagement with India is exhaustive.

We have the right to know what diplomatic efforts are being taken to uphold a reputable status of the country, especially relating to our politics. Comments on flawed information can only help deteriorate relations. It's a damaging practice.

We remember with gratitude the Indian cooperation during our liberation war. There is significant people to people contact. Thousands from Bangladesh visit India for treatment, shopping and sightseeing. We have strong trading relations with India, although there is a huge trade imbalance in favour of the bigger partner. Indian products and brands are all pervasive in Bangladesh.

Yet we are left with so many unresolved issues which India has been quite conveniently overlooking for years. We have been living with the Farakka crisis, the aggressive postures of the BSF at the borders, and the highhanded attitude of the Indian officials at land crossings and airports, to mention a few. We are likely to encounter new situations once the transit operation gets started through Bangladesh.

The accidental revelation of the comments by the Indian PM has a brighter side to it. This will help both the governments to work on the information flaws that are enormous and obtrusive. It shows a huge lack of understanding between the two governments and inept analysis of events in Bangladesh. It also reveals the sorry state of our diplomacy. We have the right to know what diplomatic efforts are being taken to uphold a reputable status of the country, especially relating to our politics.

We are even more surprised to know that our foreign ministry didn't find it necessary to make a formal statement regarding Manmohan's comment.

Comments on flawed information can only help deteriorate relations. It's a damaging practice.

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| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

The real reboot greece needs

LOUKAS TSOUKALIS

GREECE'S prime minister, George A. Papandreou, comfortably survived a confidence vote on Tuesday, momentarily stabilising his fragile Socialist government and clearing the way for a fresh infusion of financial assistance from the European Union.

But the country's economic crisis, which began at the end of 2009 when the world belatedly realised that Greece's fiscal and trade deficits were unsustainable, is far from over; in fact it has taken a new and dangerous turn.

The specter of a default on Greece's sovereign debt -- close to \$500 billion, most of it owed to other Europeans -- is haunting bankers and politicians. It could set off domino effects in the euro zone and beyond. Without urgent domestic reform and help from its European partners, Greece, a country of only 11 million people, risks being caught in an unbreakable cycle of decline.

The bailout by the European Union, with the participation of the International Monetary Fund, comes with strict conditions attached, conditions that the government has only partially met so far. The government has reduced the budget deficit to 10.5 percent of Greece's gross domestic product from more than 15 percent -- no small achievement -- and passed a bold pension reform plan. But it has been much more hesitant about structural reform of the economy and privatisation of state-controlled enterprises, because of organised opposition by vested interests, and from trade unions, and the snail's pace of

Greek bureaucracy.

With unemployment at 16 percent, Greeks have been taking to the streets in protest against unpopular measures and a political system at risk of losing its legitimacy. Populists are having a field day, offering simplistic solutions and seeking scapegoats, preferably those beyond the nation's borders. This is certainly not a phenomenon confined to Greece.

Papandreou has reshuffled his cabinet and tried to appease his party members, while putting out feelers to the main center-right opposition party over the creation of a national unity government -- so far, unsuccessful.

Who should pay for the accumulated mistakes of the past -- taxpayers or private creditors -- and how much of the burden each country should bear. We need a political agreement on these questions, instead of piecemeal measures that leave politicians two steps behind the bond markets.

fully. He has been undoubtedly weakened in the process. Greece desperately needs a radical renewal of its political class; at stake is the survival of many members of that establishment. It also needs a peaceful revolution in its economy and society. But democracy takes time. The next parliamentary elections may not be very far off, but the political and economic climate has to improve first.

A few bold measures would send the message that the government is serious about scaling down the public sector. The solution is not more taxes to pay for poor quality services and over-staffed state organisations, the

result of years of clientele politics in which the party in power appointed its friends to taxpayer-financed jobs. Greece needs more effective tax collection, together with the provision of a safety net for the rising numbers of the economically vulnerable.

But economic measures are surely not enough; in drama, as ancient Greeks knew, you need catharsis. In today's Greece, this means that people who have mismanaged public funds should be brought to justice. Neither of the main political parties has been enthusiastic about this, because they fear the unpleasant surprises from opening such a

Pandora's box. The creation of a national unity government, with a specific programme of limited duration, would help to restore public confidence and broaden support for politically difficult measures, notably the elimination of public sector jobs.

For the heavily indebted and uncompetitive economies of the European periphery, fiscal consolidation and structural reform -- the mantras of I.M.F. economists -- are a must. But what is the right dose of austerity? Too much could be economically counterproductive. Public tolerance of austerity may be reaching the breaking point.

Growth is the key; without it, any adjustment program is doomed to fail. In trying to cut bureaucratic tape, Greek politicians will need to create an environment that is propitious to investment, which has not been the case for many years.

European funds for investment could bolster the determination of local politicians to proceed with structural reform. Some in Europe are already talking about a new Marshall Plan for financially embattled countries. Solidarity with strings attached is a politically intelligent form of investment.

The sovereign debt problem in several European countries, including Greece, raises the question of who should pay for the accumulated mistakes of the past -- taxpayers or private creditors -- and how much of the burden each country should bear. We need a political agreement on these questions, instead of piecemeal measures that leave politicians two steps behind the bond markets.

Greece is at a dangerous crossroads. Other countries -- Portugal, Ireland, maybe Spain -- are coming behind it. The consequences of excessive borrowing and consumption, of the bursting of the credit bubble, have caught up with us. If we fail to deal with them effectively, the achievements of decades of increasing integration and shared sovereignty in postwar Europe may no longer be taken for granted.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 5

- 1687**
Isaac Newton publishes *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, ushering in a tidal wave of changes in thought.
- 1830**
France invades Algeria.
- 1943**
Beginning of the Battle of Kursk, the largest full-scale battle in history and the world's largest tank battle at Prokhorovka village.
- 1945**
World War II: liberation of the Philippines declared.
- 1950**
Zionism: the Knesset passes the Law of Return which grants all Jews the right to immigrate to Israel.
- 1954**
The BBC broadcasts its first television news bulletin.