

STRAIGHT LINE

Padma Bridge questions

PM's probe order is welcome

THE Padma Bridge project holds an important niche in Bangladesh's infrastructural development plans. And so when questions arise about the alleged corruption that may have crept into its planning and implementation, it is a whole nation which is left worried. For two very fundamental reasons: one, the project aims at giving a boost to the economic basis of our society, a truth we cannot lose sight of, and, two, it is undoubtedly embarrassing when questions are raised about the integrity of those involved in its implementation.

In light of the above and given the fact that the Canadian authorities are now investigating a Canada-based engineering firm on alleged corruption relating to consultancy work on the project, we welcome the move by the prime minister to order a probe into what has been happening with the Padma Bridge project. Such a directive had become necessary in view of Bangladesh's national interests being involved. With the country for years weighed down by corruption at various levels, it is important that we turn a new leaf. Indeed, that is precisely what democracy does for a society. It holds everyone to account. The prime minister's move, we expect, will swiftly resolve the problem through corrective measures being brought in.

It is also important to note that following his unusual invitation to Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) to inquire into alleged corruption in his ministry, communications minister Syed Abul Hossain has now solicited the aid of the Anti-Corruption Commission in looking into wrongdoing in his department. The sheer enormity of the allegations insofar as corruption in the Padma Bridge project is concerned is thus obvious. We therefore expect that even as the prime minister's directive for an inquiry takes form and substance, the ACC on its part will go all the way to unearthing every instance of wrongdoing with and about the project.

In recent times the World Bank has expressed its worries about the corruption related to the Padma project. It therefore makes sense to argue with renewed force that all inquiries related to the project must be undertaken purposefully. Elements bringing a bad name to the country through their sinister dealings over the project must be exposed and punished.

Tension in Turkey-Israel relations

Erdogan turns proactive in Muslim world

THE downgrade of diplomatic relations between one time allies Turkey and Israel is a very big development. This follows from the September 2, 2011 announcement by Turkey that it will formally expel Israel's ambassador and suspend all military agreements with Israel.

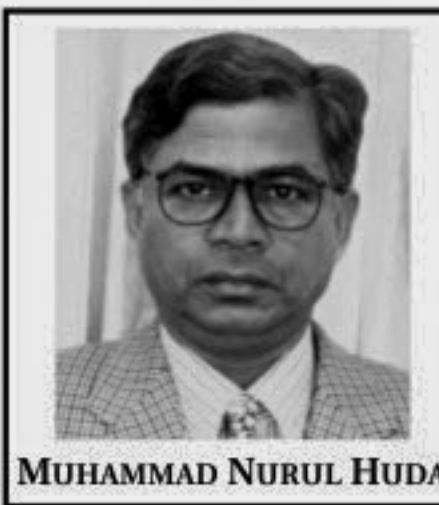
Turkey's reasoning behind this decision is a result of Israel's refusal to apologize for the May 2010 killing of Turkish activists aboard a pro-Palestinian flotilla which attempted to go through an Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Turkey refuses to re-establish ties with Israel and the latter refuses to apologize, hence marking a dead end to any revival of the once friendly relations that the two nations have shared since 1957.

It seems obvious and important to note here that from both sides, it is a question of national pride which is dominating diplomacy. It is in Turkey's best interest to maintain pragmatic relations with Israel in order for the Turkish economy not to suffer and to battle Kurdish rebels. It is equally in the best interest of Israel to maintain peaceful relations with Turkey as it reaches a more isolated position in the region. The situation is therefore a double-edged sword where neither party stands to gain.

There is no doubt that there are strong political reasons for Turkey's decision, notably related to the fact that Turkey wishes to join the EU. Since entering office, Prime Minister Erdogan has decreased the power of the military and will no longer require Israel to vouch for its pro-Western orientation. Turkey is keen on playing a hand-on role in the

Wikileaks baring extralegal methods



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE anti-secrecy Wikileaks revelations insofar as it relates to our socio-political scenario do not really come as

great surprise to the informed and also the conscious section of the community. The noticeable difference is that the not-so-unknown facets of our public life and dealings have come to the fore through the courtesy of leaked diplomatic cables sent by the embassy of the lone superpower and thus acquires heightened credibility.

The leaked cables are quite clearly assessments and analytical and consequently evaluatory. A good part of such assessments, frankly speaking, make dismal reading and highlight our medieval mindset. To be specific, when the LGRD Minister is quoted as telling the US ambassador that some of his colleagues "did not want to stop extra-judicial killings by law enforcement agencies," we feel belittled and sorry.

Similarly, one notices a detestable myopia when one learns that the then state minister of home affairs justified extra-judicial killings by saying, "Let us not discuss it. The people are happy and even the Judges are happy about it." Even the western educated suave former law minister has been quoted as saying "that the victims are all terrorists and criminals" and that Bangladeshis welcome such actions.

One tends to lose faith in our democratic identity when one reads conclusion like "There seems little doubt that crossfire killings are sanctioned and directed by the government."

Conscientious and honourable

citizens cannot help but feel disgraced to read assessment like "At this point, however, it appears that a BNP or AL affiliation of a crossfire victim is largely coincidental and reflects only the pervasive criminality of Bangladeshi politics."

Efforts to study the malady of extra-judicial killing would reveal that the

It is time, therefore, to do some serious introspection and find out as to how have we arrived at such a lugubrious scenario? The seriousness of the matter is warranted by the fact that if extra-judicial killings succeed in even implicitly acquiring the seal of approval then there remains no justification for maintaining and support-

crime operations, we are just treating the symptoms without venturing to study and assess the objective conditions promoting criminality. We do not need sociologists and criminologists to tell us that present-day crime is a complex social phenomenon caused by a multiplicity of factors and determining culpability is an extremely mind-exacting task.

What we need is adequate provision of witness protection and victim support in the criminal justice administration. To make those effective we need large injection of governmental funds. Any further delay will only swell the ranks of summary-justice seekers and the admirers of vigilante action. The decapitating adversity of the victims of crime demand mainstream support of the system.

The fact of the matter is that when investigative skills entailing unbiased efforts emerge consequent upon a strong political direction, there would not be any need to resort to extra-legal measures. In such an atmosphere, information and intelligence would come voluntarily to the benefit of victims of crime. We must, therefore, strive to create an environment where the blight of extra-judicial killings would be blissfully absent.

The rule of law and criminal jurisprudence may appear to be unequivocally in favour of the offenders, the criminals, the law-breakers, and the accused persons. That does not automatically give a license to resort to illegal measures because a civilised government must earnestly strive to demonstrate that law-enforcement effectiveness and civil liberties can co-exist in a society governed by the rule of law.

The writer is a columnist for The Daily Star.

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otherwise sensible public leaders have often appreciated the usefulness of such killings by decrying the failure of the criminal justice system to punish the inveterate criminals and bring relief to the public suffering.

The dilemma of our socio-political existence is brought home by the reality that while those wishing to see the effective writ of the rule of law are continuously pointing to the untenability of extra-judicial deaths as an acceptable socio-legal response, there is no dearth of supporters or admirers of such apparently abominable method. Random eliciting of opinions by newspapers has shown that a large majority of people entertain the view that the deplorable slide in crime and order situation can gradually be stalled by resorting to extra-judicial killings.

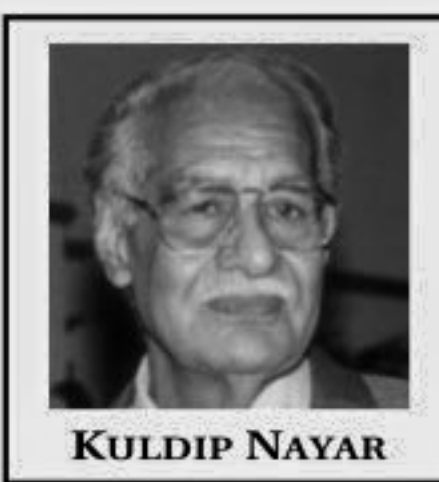
ing a justice system at public expense. The question is how low shall we stoop and offend the democratic sensibilities?

The question is, do we want sustained laborious action under the law to strengthen our democratic foundation or do we need rash desperate action without the cover of law? The extra-judicial killings, undoubtedly, do not fit in with the first proposition. We need to be absolutely clear about that.

The ultimate punishment in the alleged "extra-judicial" deaths about whose credibility many are not convinced, appear as summary response from desperate executive of law enforcement. The legality of actions leading to such extreme action apart, any responsible citizen might like to know if in our often over-zealous anti-

BETWEEN THE LINES

Even terrorism doesn't unite



KULDIP NAYYAR

INDIA has been caught on the wrong foot again. It has evoked anger over the bomb blast at Delhi High Court on

the one hand and a bit of unhappiness on the accord between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the other. Both show the helplessness which has become the badge of the Union government. In the case of the terrorist attack, it is a failure of all those engaged in protecting the nation. At Dhaka, India could not deliver on the sharing of Teesta river water because West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was not willing to release a certain quantum of water after having given word to New Delhi.

The fallout of the two is ominous for the broken and battered Manmohan Singh government. The terrorists have again dared the government which has no clue about its perpetrators, although the responsibility has been owned by the Harkatul Ansar, a breakaway group of the HujJI (Harkat-Jehadi Islami).

In fact, as soon as the blast took place, the government sources said unofficially that the needle of suspicion was directed towards the HujJI which operated from the soils of Pakistan and Bangladesh. There was little mention of the efforts that Bangladesh had made to curb terrorism, although Manmohan Singh acknowledged the cooperation of Sheikh Hasina. In the terrific noise that the bomb blast made, the hurrah over the demarcation of the border between India and Bangladesh was lost. New Delhi did not make any specific mention of the exchange of enclaves between the two countries, pending since the freedom of Dhaka in December 1971.

People in Bangladesh are disappointed because they had put all their

eggs in Teesta water basket. Yet the territorial exchange is not a mean achievement. There is uproar in Assam and the BJP is livid because it considers itself the sole custodian of *Bharat Mata*. It does not seem to be realising that the question of communal peace has to be lifted from the plain of politics to the plain of humanity. As for Teesta waters, the older generation in Bangladesh would recall how long it took to bring around West Bengal to give more water from the Farrakha barrage. Being lower

lean months. But the compromise figure worked out was fair and left most of Teesta water to the state.

In democracies, public opinion matters. It is as much potent in Bangladesh as in India. It takes time and needs a lot of patience and courage the differences to narrow down the differences. Agreements come to be evolved. The Teesta treaty will come through as the Farrakha barrage treaty did. But by damning India no purpose will be served. In contrast, India behaved maturely and there was

There is no time to quibble over small matters. Nor is there any occasion for yatra or fasts. For political parties, things are either black or white. There is a grey area which they should widen. This requires a sense of accommodation and spirit of tolerance. I feel that the glue which unites the country is drying up.

riparian, Bangladesh has every right to get water from the Teesta. The point at issue is: how much? At the time of Farrakha barrage accord, a mature, secure Chief Minister Joyti Basu headed West Bengal. The centre took time to bring him around. It could not go ahead without West Bengal's sanction because water is a state subject.

Therefore, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, mercurial and cautious, would need a lot of persuasion and a lot of support from within West Bengal. According to Manmohan Singh, she was on board till the last minute but then she changed her mind. A leader of substance became prey to rumours and self-created doubts. She fears that the communists are only waiting for an opportunity to pounce upon her after she had decimated them in the last assembly election.

True, West Bengal has the last word on giving Teesta water and that too in

no angry reaction on the stalling of transit treaty, which was a win-win situation for both.

Dhaka should be more circumspect while finding faults. The bomb blast has changed India's priorities. Its attention is focused on how to create a mechanism which could cope with terrorism which has taken roots in India. Inputs by Bangladesh would help. This was the psychological moment that Dhaka should have used to hand over the ULFA leader in detention.

No doubt, the main responsibility for security lies with New Delhi. Every time a blast takes place the government says that some heads will roll. I have not seen any so far. There does not seem to be any accountability of authorities or those who had the security system under them. Six major blasts remain undetected. The police or intelligence agencies are nowhere near finding the people behind them. They have used the same material

and exploded the same type of bomb which they had planted in May outside the Delhi High Court. Since the government has failed again and again, why not seek the assistance of America which it has offered many a time? To the credit of Washington, it has not allowed even a single incident since 9/11, the tenth anniversary which the Americans celebrated with solemnity and dignity. True, their laws are draconian. But so are ours. We too have restricted freedom which does not go well with democracy. Still blasts are taking place.

Something which baffles me is the attitude of political parties. The BJP enjoys seeing Congress-led government in trouble. This is the time when all ranks should be closed. Instead, every incident is politicised. And there is no consensus on any point. Every party places electoral considerations above the need of the nation. If New Delhi cannot engage Pakistan-an obvious choice-India should be networking with other countries which have proved that they are stronger in curbing terrorism. The time for a serious dialogue with the West has arrived. We must seize the opportunity. We do not have to be taken in by their rhetoric. In fact, we can change the collusion between the civilisations into a war between fanatics and liberals. The tragedy is that India has no leader that has vision. They are small time operators who go on indulging in their petty differences to the detriment of the country. The challenge is to the polity. There is no time to quibble over small matters. Nor is there any occasion for *yatra* or fasts. They will only divide the nation further. For political parties, things are either black or white. There is a grey area which they should widen. This requires a sense of accommodation and spirit of tolerance. I feel that the glue which unites the country is drying up.

The writer is an eminent Indian journalist.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

September 17

1787
The United States Constitution is signed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

1939
World War II: The Soviet Union joins Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland during the Polish Defensive War of 1939.

1943
World War II: The Russian city of Bryansk is liberated from Nazis.

1948
The Nizam of Hyderabad surrenders his sovereignty over the Hyderabad State and joins the Indian Union.

1970
Civil war breaks out in Jordan. King Hussein's army and Palestinian guerrillas engage in fierce fighting in major towns all over Jordan.

1974
Bangladesh, Grenada and Guinea-Bissau join the United Nations.

1978
The Camp David Accords are signed by Israel and Egypt.

1980
After weeks of strikes at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, Poland, the nationwide independent trade union Solidarity is established.

1982
Refugees massacred in Beirut camps. More than 1,000 people are feared to have been killed during a 24-hour rampage by Lebanese militia in West Beirut.