

A chorus of thousands

A first ever event marks Tagore's 150th birth anniversary

IT would not be an exaggeration to say that as a country we specialise in holding commemorative events. From religious to secular, from national to international, we have a large number of anniversaries (could perhaps even be highest in the world) that we celebrate the year-round.

But on last Thursday, we did something quite exceptional. To mark the 150th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore, Dhaka put up what could be easily termed as the grandest of such events anywhere. It was exceptionally bold in conception and literally flawless in execution. We gathered 1000 artists from all over Bangladesh to render 12 Tagore songs in a well rehearsed and competently rendered chorus that won the hearts of all those who listened both at the Bangabandhu Conference Centre and millions who watched on TV.

The event organiser was Shurer Dhara, a Tagore music school run by eminent Tagore singer, Rizwana Chowdhury Bannya, deserve to be praised for putting on such a grand show. Not only the event, Shurer Dhara, under Bannya's exceptional leadership, brought out 22 DVDs with rendition of all the 2,222 songs contained in Tagore's *Geetobitan*. This is a magnificent effort that deserves both national and international recognition. As a result of this effort Tagore music lovers all over the world will now be able to learn all the songs of Tagore in a easily accessible manner.

Today as we celebrate Tagore's birth anniversary in this grandiose manner, we cannot fail to recall that in the mid-sixties Tagore music was banned in the then East Pakistan by the then government of Gen. Ayub Khan. That act further convinced our people that Pakistan was out to destroy our cultural heritage and added to the growing realization that independence was the only way for us to survive as a people. We take pride and great satisfaction for having travelled from those dark days to the sunshine of our freedom.

This newspaper congratulates Shurer Dhara, its leader, Rizwana Chowdhury Bannya, and all others who helped to bring this magnificent event to fruition.

Increased use of illegal weapons

Put a brake on it

IN a recent incident a shopkeeper was shot dead in the old part of the capital and several others were injured in the same incident. On the very same day a businessman in Uttara was shot and injured. And in both these incidents the assailants took away a large sum of money that the victims had on them.

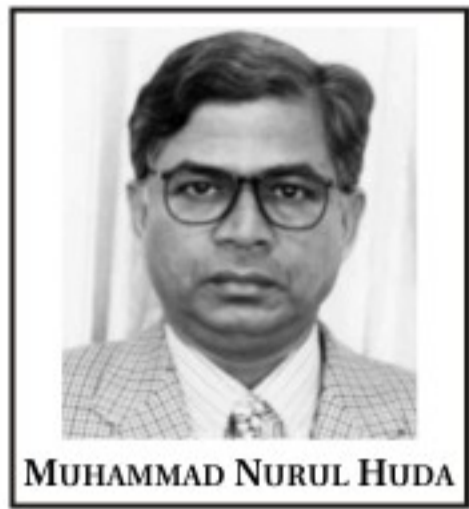
If one were to take a stock of the spate of killings in the country in recent times one would be deeply distressed by the fact that a good percentage of those killed were victims of small arms. And in all probability, the arms were all illegal.

These two incidents are fairly representative of the state of law and order in the country that the home minister would like us to believe to be better than in the last ten years. However, it would be wrong on the part of the government to dismiss these as stray incidents. Apart from the fact that these are indicative of the flux in the society they show a serious problem which the government can ignore but only at peril.

It seems that without so much as knowing it, there is a proliferation of illegal small arms that are taking tolls of lives daily. The comment of the DMP Commissioner shows exactly the lack of internalisation of the problem. While he has directed his forces to go on special drive against muggers and other criminals, what he and those above him should concentrate on is to ensure that the criminals cannot come by illegal weapons to ply their trade.

We strongly feel that there is need for a coordinated drive right from the borders to prevent entry of illegal weapons inside the country. And there have been reports that of late a large quantity of illicit weapons and drugs has been finding their way inside Bangladesh. Special drive must also be conducted against workshops producing unauthorised weapons. And the sooner the drive is

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

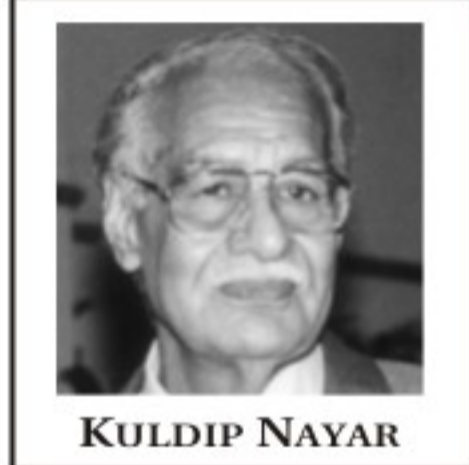
involve-ment in political affairs and the ramifications thereof. It refers to a parliamentary sub-committee's probe report wherein it has been suggested that the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence's interference in politics should be stopped.

On account of the secret and sensitive nature of intelligence functions only a few may prefer a free and frank discourse on the modus operandi of intelligence organisation. Present day security experts are, however, of the considered view that open discussion by competent and concerned persons may in fact rationalise the operations of such organisation to the benefit of a democratic polity.

One has to remember that intelligence bosses enjoy privileged access to the top political executives, the prime minister and the home minister. The agencies provide direction to police organisations in addition to providing political-analytical inputs to the ruling regimes. The agencies have undertaken strategic exercises during elections, and conduct election forecasts and analyses to oblige the party in power.

Sub-continental experience shows that far from being confined to the proper intelligence role, over-zealous bosses became almost a confidante of the chief executive, adept at every task entrusted to them. There are reasons to believe the truly political role of the

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

Pal (ombudsman) machinery to deal with corruption, reservation can be dynamite. So let the proposal of such step be analysed carefully. What it means is that out of the 9-member Lok Pal, 50% will be from the Schedules Castes, Schedules Tribes, women and backward classes.

This is the first time since independence when the principle of reservation has been extended to top positions. Tomorrow, a similar demand may be made on the appointment of judges in the High Courts and the Supreme Court. This principle, pernicious enough, stops the best talent from the country being chosen for top jobs. Instead, anyone can be brought as long as he or she fulfills the qualification for reservations.

This approach has already forced the country to lower the standard of education and the quality of government service. Yet, there is nothing anybody can do even to fix the time limit for reservations because any suggestion on the subject creates furore from the interested groups. All political parties are enslaved to reservations because they link them with their electoral prospects. The ruling Congress too has fixed its eyes on elections in January-March 2012 in five states, including UP, Punjab and Utrakhland. Reservations may influence the dalits who have turned their back on the party.

Yet, something more acrimonious happened when the bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha. Members belonging to Other Backward Classes (OBC) demanded a quota for Muslims. The government gave in because it also has the Muslim electorate to placate. Although Muslims have been allotted

crucial intelligence organ of our state. The important lesson to be learnt is that politicisation or lack of impartiality and objectivity in intelligence reporting can distort the policy process and thus damage the credibility and political legitimacy of the state. Therefore, is it not time that we know if our intelligence organs enjoy the benefit of a legal framework and a well-honed charter of duties? The political leadership has to perhaps decide whether they and the country stand to benefit if intelligence agencies are made to function in a political manner.

The mission and strategy of our intelligence organisations have not been stable at least insofar as the domestic

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threat perception is concerned. It invariably changes with the change of a political government. Differing political agenda often tend to cloud the pragmatic understanding of our real national interests.

The broad function of maintaining public order for ensuring internal security is closely associated with the task of collecting and collating intelligence in the interest of the state. In reality, in our situation, the interests of the state often get diluted and mixed up with the interests of the government of the day. The situation is marked by an unfortunate lack of understanding and appreciation of the requirements of the state and the

government in a democratic and pluralist society like ours.

The unpleasant truth is that intelligence agencies maintain files and shadow the leaders and workers of pronouncedly constitutional politics-oriented parties belonging to the opposition who are recognised partners in the business of politics. At some point of time when such opposition party comes to power, there is an uneasy relationship between the political masters and the agencies. In such a scenario, professionalism becomes the worst casualty, sense of direction is lost and the organisation dips into a lackadaisical environment and interests of the state take a back seat, giving greater

space to partisan considerations. It needs to be kept in mind that the values of a democratic polity are universal and as such demand unconditional adherence to them.

A national agency is expected to be able to effectively serve national interests if directed appropriately by the political authority. If they (agencies) have to remain preoccupied with largely inconsequential partisan matters to the detriment of national interest, then we will not be able to manage the crisis situation, not to speak of forestalling the tragedies of recent times. We have been criticising the agencies very loudly without, however, appreciating the

responsibility for not having the bill passed by the end of the year, a demand made by the Gandhian Anna Hazare who is leading a movement for the passage of Lok Pal bill.

I am unable to make out why the Congress withdrew its support at the last minute to the draft bill, which had got a near consensus at the all-party meeting at the prime minister's residence. The hitch may have been because of the reported opposition by Congress President Sonia Gandhi, who has said that they are ready to take on Anna Hazare. The

last time it was her son, Rahul Gandhi, who had diluted the bill finalised by the Parliament Standing Committee. Its Chairman Abhishek Manu Singhvi has admitted that he met the Congress high command on the eve of the bill's finalisation.

The country is going through political and economic crises. Any wrong step by the government or by civil society can harm the nation and unwittingly support the parochial and desperate elements.

has been given to religious minorities, Muslims and Christians.

Legal experts have pronounced that the government's step to give reservation to religious minorities is unconstitutional. But in the meanwhile the atmosphere of parochialism is affecting different communities and creating an embarrassing situation for civil society. The Congress could not have hit the ethos of pluralism more severely than it has done by introducing reservations in top positions.

This may well be a move to defeat the Lok Pal bill in Parliament because the BJP would never agree to a quota for Muslims. It, along with the left which is against reservation in principle, can defeat the bill in the Rajya Sabha, the Upper House, where the Congress and its allies cannot muster a majority. But the BJP should be prepared to bear the

impediments to the growth of an apolitical professional organisation. Time has come when we must have the honesty to call a spade a spade and realise that the governments will change hands but not the state.

A considered view is that intelligence agencies should not be the judge of their own operations with regard to the necessity and propriety thereof, nor should they be allowed to operate as the agency or instrument of politicians, or degenerate into an institution for controlling the opponents of the party in power, or elements within the party in power with whom the high command of the party does not see eye to eye.

At the heart of the matter, there should be a prescription for a charter of duties for the intelligence organs, putting responsibilities beyond doubt and to indicate what is permitted and what is prohibited.

The purpose for which intelligence has to be collected has to be clearly spelt. The same should not be to subserve the interests of a political party or an individual, or to blackmail or control the opponents of the political party in power or hostile elements within the establishment.

A detailed and precisely honed charter for the intelligence organs in consonance with the spirit of the constitution needs to be worked out. Our intelligence organisation needs to work under pragmatic political leadership and if properly and professionally steered, it cannot threaten our liberties. The last thing we can afford to do now is to put our intelligence in chains. Its protective and informative role is indispensable in times of continuing violence.

The writer is a Columnist of The Daily Star.

with the chief justice. It is, however, good to note that both the government and Anna Hazare have agreed to keep the judiciary out of ambit of Lok Pal. But the appointment of Judicial Commission, sought through a bill, requires more teeth. Also the Commission should have some eminent public men as its members.

It seems that the bill has been drafted in haste and probably with the purpose that it should fall either in Parliament or in the court. True, the government has accommodated Anna Hazare on many points, but if one were to analyse the provisions it would be clear that what the government gives with one hand it takes away with the other. Yet I wish the Lokpal bill had the constitutional authority which the BJP had unthinkingly forced to fall in the Lok Sabha for not being able to get the required two-third majority.

Against this backdrop I can understand the pressure by Anna Hazare to pass the bill, but I am unable to appreciate his fast for 3 days when Parliament had already taken up the bill. In any case, he had given the call for jail bharo (fill the jail) from January. His enunciation, to propagate against the Congress in the five state assemblies to defeat the party, is suspect. This unnecessarily gives strength to the allegation that the whole movement is political and meant to help the BJP and some other opposition parties.

The country is going through political and economic crises. Any wrong step by the government or by civil society can harm the nation and unwittingly support the parochial and desperate elements. I recall the words of US President Jefferson from his inaugural address: "Let us reflect that, having banished from our land that religious intolerance under which mankind so long bled and suffered, we have yet gained little if we countenance a political intolerance as despotic, as wicked, and capable of as bitter and bloody persecutions."

The writer is an eminent Indian Columnist.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

December 31

- 1600** The British East India Company is chartered.
- 1906** Mozaffar ad-Din Shah Qajar signs the Persian Constitution of 1906.
- 1946** President Harry Truman officially proclaims the end of hostilities in World War II.
- 1991** All official Soviet Union institutions have ceased operations by this date and the Soviet Union is officially dissolved.
- 1992** Czechoslovakia is peacefully dissolved, resulting in the creation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia.
- 1994** The first Chechen war: Russian army began a New Year's storm of Grozny.