

## Suranjit's resignation

*A welcome start to a fair investigation*

**T**HOUGH it comes belated, we welcome the resignation of the railway minister in light of the recent scandal concerning his ministry and some of its high-ranking officials. The dramatic episode has brought into sharp focus the blatant nature of corruption and has corroded the credibility of the government. The detachment of the minister, therefore, from not only the process but also the concerned ministry at this time was expected in the interests of a fair investigation.

However, we would like to stress that the resignation is not the main problem at hand. The key issue is a thorough and impartial investigation which will get to the truth of the matter. While the testimony of three individuals claiming that they were headed for the minister's residence with the car carrying a large and unaccounted for amount of money puts him in the spotlight, his involvement remains subject to proof. That an incident of corruption has taken place is evident; but it remains to be revealed who the culprits are and what the extent of the nexus is. May we add, the APS and the driver yet remain out of the law's grip. This may be a good opportunity to scrutinise the level of corruption in the railway ministry overall as well as in other ministries, against which allegations of corruption are rife.

Regarding the investigation at hand, it is our hope that it will be a thorough and unbiased effort at unveiling the facts of a very serious case of corruption which reflects most negatively on the integrity of the government. We urge the ACC to energetically pursue the case.

We expect that government and party concerns will not shield and excuse those responsible, overriding the huge public concern that is at issue. The truth must not be prevaricated. In the past, allegations of graft against ministers and other high-ranking government officials have often been swept under the rug and, with time, faded from public discussion without any consequences, not only encouraging widespread corruption but creating a most dangerous culture of impunity for the corrupt. We hope that this case will prove different, where the truth will be revealed and those responsible held to account. The entire government's credibility is at stake here.

Risking self-eulogy, we cannot help saying had the media not kept its focus right on the unfolding scenario the present turn in the event might have eluded us.

## UP chairman's highhandedness

*Unbecoming of public officeholder*

**N**EW appearing in this paper recently that the principal of the Agriculture Training Institute (ATI) in Faridpur was assaulted in his residence by the thugs of a union parishad chairman because he was not offered "proper protocol" by the principal when he had called on the latter in his office, is indeed disturbing. The principal felt threatened enough to flee his place of work and take refuge in Dhaka.

However, there is more to the affair than the question of protocol. It had to do with coercing the principal to accept a teacher, who happened to be the UP chairman's brother, who was posted out several months ago from the ATI on charges of professional misconduct. He was posted back to the same institute, and here is the catch, on the recommendation of the Labour Minister reportedly, who the chairman claimed to be his cousin. The principal had initially refused to accept his joining order, but was bullied to do so.

We are also at a loss as to what to make of the Labour Minister's remarks with regards to the incident. He seemed to have put the blame on the principal suggesting that it was the principal who had misbehaved with the UP chairman and, almost as a retort, had suggested that such offenders should not be spared. That is, we are afraid, condoning a blatant highhandedness of the UP chairman and the physical attack on the principal by his apparatchiks. There are other avenues of redress of a government employee's misbehavior and physical assault is certainly not one of those.

We would like to draw the attention of the relevant authorities for appropriate action against the UP chairman in this regard. It cannot be the remit of a UP chairman

# Kabul attacks highlight Afghan unpreparedness

SYED MANSUR HASHIM

**T**HE combined attacks on government installations including the parliament and Nato garrisons in three separate districts have driven home one message loud and clear: Afghan security forces trained by the United States are hardly in any shape to takeover from the International forces in 2014. Though the battle raged on for hours on end and there was little damage done, the reputation of the newly trained Afghan forces has taken a serious hit, particularly so because insurgents were able to hit some of the best defended sites in the capital and elsewhere.

Hence, from both a psychological and tactical point of view, the purpose of driving home the message that the Taliban are far from a spent force has been achieved. Whilst Afghan forces have been showered with accolades for their ability to neutralise the threat after 18 hours of battle, the fact that well-armed groups were able to penetrate into areas considered to be "safe havens" has rattled nerves. As pointed out to by a well-known Afghan member of parliament Wazhma Frogh who was caught up in the crossfire: "I was nearly shot in the back as I was walking down the street, not by a terrorist but by the Afghan police who were just shooting at everything. They had no idea where they were firing."

The sophistication of the latest attacks highlights one thing: The

insurgents, whoever they may be, have learnt to launch and coordinate simultaneous attacks on a variety of targets in different parts of the country. All this requires meticulous long-term planning, significant resources in terms of a solid support base that provide safe housing to dedicated teams of fighters and storage of a variety of weaponry. The other revelation, and one that is far more disturbing, is that the Taliban have access to excellent intelligence about

are on the government side to ensure safety and security in the capital, let alone the whole country. A decade of occupation has not brought peace to war-ravaged Afghanistan. And with time running out for the Karzai government in the backdrop of an imminent US withdrawal, the first tentative steps have been taken to reach out to the opposition in the hope of finding a peaceful solution

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security measures in and around the capital. On the contrary, Afghan security forces had little or inkling about the series of attacks that shook the country on April 15.

So where does that leave the Obama administration with its planned withdrawal from the country in 2014? There is no denying the fact that Afghanistan has not been subjected to this sort of a firefight since 2001. While attempts are made to show the world how it was Afghan forces that ultimately quelled the violence, the fact that groups of armed fighters were able to get rockets fired off at the parliament whilst the house was in session shows how woefully inadequate preparations

through a political peace process.

Yet here too there have been problems. The willingness to talk to some Taliban factions whilst ignoring others have not helped matters. Once an ally of the West in the fight against the Soviets, Hekmatyar has since 2001 turned out to be a formidable foe to both Kabul and Nato forces. As pointed out by Vali Nasr, a onetime adviser on Afghanistan and Pakistan to the late Richard Holbrook, President Obama's envoy to the region, "Hekmatyar was seldom discussed. He was seen as the smallest and least powerful of the three elements of the Taliban: the Quetta Shura, The Haqqani Network and Hizb-e-Islami. He is a local

problem, rather than a strategic one."

Yet, this "local problem" has now become a major problem. There is little doubt that the latest attacks were indeed masterminded by Hekmatyar's faction. The timing of the attack could not have come at a better time given that Nato and allies were in the final phase of putting together plans for transition of security to Afghan forces. Given current realities on the ground, it can safely be stated that the withdrawal of international forces in 2014 will result in total chaos returning to the country. The local Afghan forces obviously have a long way to go before they are in a position to tackle a force as formidable and resourceful as the Taliban.

Since the military "option" has been exercised for the greater part of the decade and not achieved a resounding victory for either side, there is no recourse but to sue for peace for the government at the center should it wish to survive. However, the latest show of force by a newly rejuvenated Taliban in all its various shades and hues, they will in all probability drive a hard bargain at the negotiating table. It would be wise not to set preconditions for talks, for the boot is no longer on Karzai's foot and time unfortunately is running out fast for a negotiated settlement that would see Afghanistan return to the fraternity of peaceful nations.

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## SUNDAY POUCH

# Bangladesh needs trans-boundary water policy



ASHEFAQUR RAHMAN

under construction, some have been completed and still others are on the drawing board. When they are implemented some of them will impact Bangladesh.

The Himalayan mountain range is the centre point from which scores of Asian rivers originate. The Ganges, Brahmaputra and the tributary of Irabarti are the major rivers that also flow through Bangladesh. Our country shares waters of 54 rivers with India and 3 with Myanmar.

If upstream countries divert normal water flow through dams, we will see many of our rivers dry up, our irrigation system destroyed and life killed in our water bodies. If the water flowing through these common rivers is not managed well, it can flood a large part of Bangladesh each year.

India is planning and implementing several projects to dam up our common rivers. The fact is that we are not even taken into confidence about their intentions. We are not privy to the progress made in the projects upstream.

When a dam is built, the river valley is first tampered with and there is a great loss of habitat there. Second, the dam leads to a change in the morphology of the downstream river bed and (in our case) the delta. Our coastline changes too, due to changed sediment load. An important aspect is change in the quality of water downstream. The nutrient load of a river is depleted. Biodiversity, which is unique to a river, then changes as organisms begin to flow in low quantities.

All these changes also lead to changes in climate conditions. Siltation occurs with variation in water table, and aquatic life is disturbed in the lower riparian areas. There is little or no recharge of ground water aquifers and therefore there is a rise in pollution. However,

the greatest effect is on the socio-economic environment. Due to less water available downstream, there is little or no employment. People have less drinking water. Production in factories slows down too. The economy can go into a tail spin. Public agitation begins. People start to move to areas where more water is available. Internal migration becomes the norm and the state is forced to rehabilitate masses of people in already crowded areas.

Under these circumstances, Bangladesh needs to craft a trans-

flowing through our territory, out of a total of 800 rivers and tributaries.

The UN Convention on the Law of Non-navigational Uses of International Water Courses (yet to be in force) provides a framework for cooperation within international river basins. From the first century of the present millennium there have been more than 3,600 instruments relating to international water courses. Some 286 international agreements or treaties are also in place. However, most treaties concerning shared waters are bilat-

*Bangladesh needs to craft a trans-boundary water policy if it does not want to face future political and economic chaos. But before we do that we need to first understand the legal principles which guide the regime of trans-boundary rivers.*

boundary water policy, if it does not want to face future political and economic chaos.

But before we do that we need to first understand the legal principles which guide the regime of trans-boundary rivers. The principle of equitable use of trans-boundary water resources and the obligation not to cause harm in the management of trans-boundary water resources must be understood. There are these three different paths towards these goals:

Signing treaties or agreements that just stop short of allocating water between riparian states. These are treaties that define navigation rights of the states through which the river runs through or to combat pollution in the common river;

Initialing agreements allocating water between states;

Signing agreements for joint management of internationally shared rivers.

eral and relate to specific rivers.

Treaties are guided by customary international law or state practice. Such guidelines are based on one or more of the following doctrines:

1) Harmon Doctrine of Absolute Sovereignty: This claims absolute freedom of a riparian state, often the upper riparian. However, this has never got international acceptance;

2) Doctrine of Absolute Riverian Integrity: Here a state may not alter the natural flow of a river passing through its territory in any manner that will affect the water in another state;

3) Doctrine of Limited Territorial Sovereignty: This happens to be the most accepted doctrine in resolving international water disputes. It follows the general legal obligation to use ones property in a manner that it will not cause injury to others;

4) Doctrine of Communality of International Waters: This treats the total volume of basin water (in our case we have three river basins: the Padma, the Meghna and the Brahmaputra) as a shared resource. Each river basin is a single geographic and economic unit that overlaps two or more states, and its resources from the rivers must be shared.

5) Doctrine of Correlative Rights: This emphasises the best utilisation of joint water resources rather than on ownership rights.

From these doctrines, certain legal norms have evolved. They are:

The duty to cooperate and negotiate;

Prohibition of practices that can cause major injuries to other states (like Tipaimukh Dam);

The duty to prior consultation; and

Principle of equitable utilisation of shared resources.

We must therefore choose from the above and firm up our position. We must also seek out the legal international norms that will protect our national interest when we sit down to manage the freshwater resource flowing through our land. Several experts have said that we may embrace a combination of the Doctrine of Limited Territorial Sovereignty, the Doctrine of Communality of International Waters and the Doctrine of Correlative Rights.

Our diplomats and water experts should brainstorm intensively with politicians to craft the most appropriate trans-boundary water policy. We have very little time in hand, as India is rushing to build structures as well as work on river linking projects. Any structure that will divert the waters of the common rivers would mean disaster for Bangladesh. We are already faced with the vicissitudes of climate change. We cannot afford a double jeopardy.

We may also consult with international legal experts, the World Bank and other multilateral agencies. If need be we should raise our voice in the United Nations or take our case to the International Court to get our rights established, if bilateral negotiations are purposely delayed or adverse outcomes are anticipated.

In this matter, we are reminded of a saying by Franklin Roosevelt: "To reach a port, we must sail -- not tie at anchor. Sail and not drift." Today, our water policy must not remain adrift.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 17

**1397** Geoffrey Chaucer tells the Canterbury Tales for the first time at the court of Richard II.

**1895** The Treaty of Shimonoseki between China and Japan is signed. This marks the end of the First Sino-Japanese War, and the defeated Qing Empire is forced to renounce its claims on Korea.

**1946** Syria obtains its Independence from the French occupation.

**1969** Sirhan Sirhan is convicted of assassinating Robert F. Kennedy.

**1971** The People's Republic of Bangladesh forms, under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Mujibnagar.

**1978** Mir Akbar Khyber was assassinated, provoking a communist coup d'état in Afghanistan.