

STRAIGHT LINE

Carnage at city centre

Opposition flexes muscle and government pre-empted probe

Vivid pictures of pitched battles between picketers and law enforcers at the heart of the commercial district of Dhaka flashed across Television sets on April 19-20 as the BNP activists went on the rampage that saw senseless destruction of public and private property has shocked this newspaper, as well as millions of peace loving people of the country. The fact that nearly 30 policemen sustained varying degrees of injury and even media persons and their vehicles did not escape some form of assault goes to show both the ferocity of the attack and points to the fact that adequate preparations for such an outcome had been well thought prior to the incident.

Whilst we are all alarmed by the disappearance of a local BNP leader, we are equally alarmed to see the rampage of hundreds of so-called 'party' activists create anarchy in the name of protest. The fact that homemade bombs have been used to create terror sends a chill down the collective spines of citizens across the land. The message that has been delivered is both clear and loud. We must observe Sunday's *hartal* or face BNP's wrath.

We condemn this violence and the strong-arm tactic utilised by the opposition. However, we also watch in dismay how the prime minister orders a probe into the disappearance of Mr. Ilias Ali while simultaneously insinuates that the BNP chairperson has ordered her man to go into hiding -- and all this on the very same day. When such contradictory messages are uttered by none other than the honourable PM herself, does it not show the farcical nature of the probe ordered?

This paper has repeatedly stressed on the need to establish proper investigation into criminal events. In any democracy, the rule of law is a fundamental requisite to good governance. The manner in which the political scenario is evolving, where violence is propagated by one party in opposition that is met with an equally harsh response by another party in power bringing into play all the considerable resources available to the State, forebodes a very dangerous time for democracy. A democracy devoid of rule of law as shown by both the ruling party and the opposition is a democracy in trouble. We must all work together to avoid it.

Civil Surgeon claiming signature fee?

What it has come to!

WE have known it for some time that many government officials are apt to demand signing money for certification of an entitlement which falls within the purview of their normal duties to dispose of. The fact that they are of a status that enables them to certify someone approaching them, albeit with the right documents, is a matter of prestige for the certifier. More importantly, they are helping people to meet an official formality required to be fulfilled by some authority in the government of which they are a part.

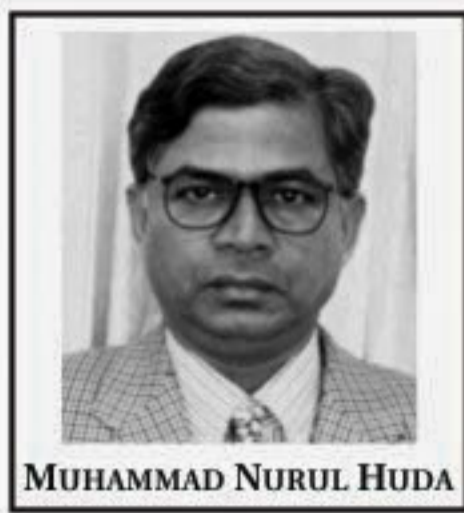
A *Prothom Alo* report titled 'I do not sign for anything less than Tk 400' says it all. Referring to a civil surgeon's fixed demand for giving health certificate to newly recruited government appointees it confirms the public impression that even in receiving a legitimate service a citizen has to grease a palm.

By the civil surgeon's own admission, the malpractice has been continuing for a number of years by way of a preceding civil surgeon handing down the right to gratification to a succeeding incumbent.

When the reporter demanded receipt for such payment, a startled civil surgeon said he couldn't do it. When told that the matter would be reported, he tried to put up a brave face as if he could not care less. But that was a momentary bravado as he cracked inside realising the consequences of being reported. He came to senses, expressed his regret and implored the journalist not to make a news of it. But the news had to come out in public interest and it has, our thanks to the reporter.

Beneath the culpability of the extortionist attitude on the part of a government official there is a deeper malaise. The government officers are paid to serve the citizens but they make the latter feel as if they are favouring them. This is a serious deficiency of administrative culture which needs to be urgently redressed because it is an

Maoist insurgency in the neighbourhood



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

IN India Maoist insurgency influence spans 223 districts across 20 states, although of course the degree of activity varies vastly.

The Maoist insurgency has become grave owing to the recurring attacks by the Maoists against the symbols of Indian democratic state-such as the elected representatives of people, electricity stations, transmission towers, railway tracks, jails, armouries, police stations, schools -- and the killing of a large number of security personnel, suspected police informants, and so on.

Indian prime minister has correctly pointed out that left-wing extremism is "India's greatest internal security threat." The intensification of security measures referred to as "Operation Green Hunt" by the media needs to be seen against this backdrop.

The increasing militarisation of Maoists becomes evident from the high number of fatalities in the violence perpetrated by them during the past few years and, the modern arms and equipment they are now fielding.

When they launched their violent campaign in 1967, in Naxalbari village of West Bengal, the Maoists fought with ordinary weapons such as spears, sickles and farm implements. Now they boast of .303 rifles, SLRs, LMGs, AKs, INSAS rifles, mortar -- all looted from the security forces, and rockets and rocket launchers, and anti-personnel pressure mines and explosive devices including landmines, claymore mines and directional mines.

Along with increasing militarisation, fatalities in Maoist violence have been fairly high consistent over the past few years. If anything, the numbers are going to rise for a few succeeding years as the security forces mount operations

against the guerrillas and the latter indulge in bizarre and mindless killings to blunt security operations.

An important trend currently being witnessed in the Maoist movement is urban penetration. This should be seen together with the Maoist plan of forming Tactical United Front (TUF) activities, because the presence in towns and cities would boost TUF activities.

The Maoists always had a presence in towns and cities to cater to logistics needs and stay in safe houses during medical treatment or in transit. Because of the anonymity it accords, it becomes easy for the Maoists to stay and operate in urban centres.

The Maoists seem to be acting on a long-term perspective plan. In their scheme of things, they hope to gain control over the working class movement and use it appropriately at a later

stage when their so-called New Democratic Revolution advances and furthers. In the immediate to short-term, the objective is to gain control over key (strategic) industries with a view to inflicting damage on the state's capacity to fight the Maoists, either through organising sabotage activities or bringing production to a halt.

According to an internal document of the CPI (Maoist) they envisage penetrating the working class movement in industries such as communication, oil and natural gas, coal, transport, power, defence production, etc.

Along with increasing militarisation, fatalities in Maoist violence have been high. These numbers are going to rise as the security forces mount operations against the guerrillas and the latter indulge in mindless killings to blunt security operations.

According to the Maoist, Tactical United Front is one of the three magic

huge drain on state finances as rebuilding the infrastructure is a welfare function of the state, but an expensive and avoidable proposition.

The Maoists have, over time, established a wide web of linkages, both fraternal and opportunistic. These extend from the immediate neighbourhood (South Asia) to Europe and Peru to the West of India and The Philippines to the East.

There are members of the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties of South Asia (CCOMPOSA), which was formed in July 2001, along with like-minded groups from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri

Lanka. The linkage between the Maoist of India and Nepal has varied from purely ideological to 'strategic,' and this has been noted in successive Annual Reports of the Indian Ministry of Ministry of Home Affairs.

The Naxal movement has continued to grow in spite of the comprehensive policy due to the poor implementation of the schemes by the states. The administrative and security establishments in the states have lacked commitment, dedication and, above all, competence to deliver. There has been decades of neglect of the state police forces in the states worst affected by the Naxal problem. The police-population ratios of the affected states are very low.

As against the international norms of 250 policemen per 100,000 and national average of 143, Bihar is a low 79, Jharkhand 164, Chhattisgarh 134, UP 94, and Orissa 100. Policemen in these states operate under abysmal working conditions with little technical support, antiquated weapons and hardly any training in jungle warfare.

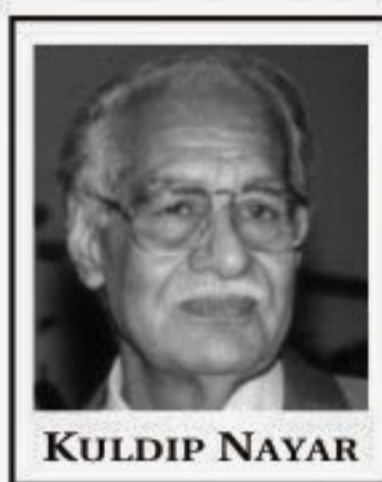
The Maoist challenge is complex and formidable. It cannot be contained by security measures alone. The state must follow a multi-pronged strategy. While the armed Maoists will have to be subdued by the security forces, though with a human face, the state must end the multifaceted exploitation of people and make them partners in progress.

Only inclusive growth will stem the tide. The human rights activists and left-wing intellectuals must be engaged in debate and convinced that, notwithstanding all the shortcomings, a democratic republic can redress problems of the teeming millions with freedom, liberty and equality and not the warped failed ideology which talks in terms of armed insurrection and violence which has been junked even in the country of its origin.

The writer is a columnist for *The Daily Star*.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Children of god?



KULDIP NAYYAR

WHEN an Australian editor posed a question to the Indian press on why it never had a *dalit*, the untouchable, at a top position in journalism, I

felt embarrassed. I considered it an omission which should have been rectified long ago and felt confident that it would happen before long.

But after noticing that no attention was paid a few days ago to the 121st anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a Gandhi for the dalits, I have come to believe that the discrimination against the *dalits* is a prejudice which would take many decades to wear off. They are at the lowest rung of the Hindu society which develops a bias against them at an early age and has no shame in perpetuating it.

The only thing to remind Dr. Ambedkar was a full-page advertisement sponsored by the central government in leading newspapers. There was also a small function around his portrait in the central hall of parliament which is out of bounds for an ordinary citizen. I did not see television channels showing any programme on Dr. Ambedkar, nor did I find any edit or article in any newspaper to recall his services.

Dr. Ambedkar is the framer of India's constitution and we owe the parliamentary system to him. This is enshrined in the constitution. I recall how boldly he stood in parliament to have a provision against untouchability, the bane of Hindu society, and how he expressed hope that the prejudice would disappear. Yet the upper caste has proved him wrong.

Reservations given to the Scheduled Castes, namely the *dalits*, are laid down in the constitution. But this was despite his opposition. He was against reservations which he compared with crutches by the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and other Congress leaders

prevailed upon him to accept the provision for 10 years.

Little did Dr. Ambedkar realise at that time that political parties on the one hand and the vested interests among *dalits*, particularly the creamy layer, on the other would go on prolonging reservations for electoral advantage. So demanding is this consideration that reservations are given extensions decade after decade without a debate in parliament.

The Hindu society should be grateful to Dr. Ambedkar that he and his followers embraced Buddhism. He had

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threatened to convert to Islam along with his *dalit* followers to escape discrimination. Mahatma Gandhi beseeched him and even threatened to go on fast unto death. Dr. Ambedkar bowed before the wishes of Gandhi but refused to return to the fold of Hinduism.

Even conversion has not helped the *dalits*. They are more or less treated in Islam, Christianity or Sikhism in the same way as in the Hindu society. The *dalits* carry the tag of discrimination and helplessness wherever they go, although the three religions claim equality for the followers. Therefore, the *dalits* have not escaped the rigours of caste system even outside Hinduism. The Sachar committee has pointed out the inhuman treatment meted out to them even when they have embraced Islam.

Gandhiji christened the *dalit* as

Harijan, Son of god. But it reflected a patronising attitude which the *dalit* scornfully rejected. Why the *dalits*, who constitute some 17% of India's population, have continued to stay in the Hindu society despite all the insults heaped on them is beyond me. They have never revolted nor have they taken any step to harm the Hindu society which still does not give them even a modicum of individuality.

A few years ago some *dalits*, led by Kanshi Ram, constituted a political party of their own, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). It has won them political recogni-

they cannot afford to risk the livelihood.

At the same time, crimes against the *dalits* have not lessened. There is a proposal to give arms to them in what are called "atrocities prone areas." Obviously, the government has failed to protect the *dalits* and their property. Unfortunately, the police force is also on the side of the landlords and other vested interests who treat the *dalits* as their subject like the maharaja used to do.

Official figures reveal that there is a huge backlog of cases relating to the atrocities committed against the *dalits*. Had the centre been serious about preventing atrocities against them it would have taken measures like special courts, fast track prosecution and steps to dispose of cases quickly. Strangely, the Patna High Court has acquitted all the 23 persons accused of perpetrating the massacre of 21 *dalits* at Bathani Tola in Bhojpur.

It should have been clear by now that no law or no government action can do away with the evil of untouchability. You cannot succeed if the mindset does not change. What the children have grown up with in the name of tradition or religion is prejudiced and cannot be effaced until the society is forced to give up bias which has got entrenched.

The country needs a social revolution. Alas, I do not find any meaningful movement to bring it about. Take, for example, the belief that girls are a burden. How many of them are killed either in womb or after birth is not possible to count. That it happens mostly in north India, particularly Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and UP is no solace.

A sustained effort to change the mindset and remove the clogs of superstition can make a dent into this widely prevailing evil. But no political party is interested in doing so. Nor are the activists because they are aiming at economic changes. Social problems are begging for attention.

The writer is an eminent Indian Journalist.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 21

753 BC Romulus and Remus founded Rome (traditional date)

1792 Tiradentes, a revolutionary leading a movement for Brazil's independence, is hanged, drawn and quartered.

1945 Red Army enters outskirts of Berlin. Russian troops capture some outlying suburbs of Berlin at the beginning of what promises to be a bitter battle for control of the city.

1975 Vietnam War: President of South Vietnam Nguyen Van Thieu flees Saigon, as Xuan Loc, the last South Vietnamese outpost blocking a direct North Vietnamese assault on Saigon, falls.

1975 Vietnam's President Thieu resigns. The President of South Vietnam steps down accusing the United States of betrayal in a blistering attack broadcast to the nation.

1989 Tiananmen Square Protests of 1989: In Beijing, around 100,000 students gather in Tiananmen Square to commemorate Chinese reform leader Hu Yaobang.