

STRAIGHT LINE

Tokyo-Dhaka ties

Japanese Deputy PM's visit bolsters them

JAPANESE Deputy Prime Minister Katsuya Okada's trip to Dhaka has proved useful in some distinct ways. For one thing, his visit has marked a renewal of contact between Japan and Bangladesh at a high level since Foreign Minister Taro Aso's visit to Dhaka in 2006. For another, it has cleared the air of any confusion over Japan's financing some of our important infrastructure projects.

The two countries have had notes to exchange and experiences to share, especially following Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Tokyo in 2010. Then came devastating Tsunami striking Japan. But as ever resilient, the country has bounced back. Simultaneous with its rebuilding efforts, Tokyo continues with its international assistance programmes without any let-up.

In this context, we welcome Okada's statement that Japan has no reservations about changes in Dhaka's metro rail plan; on the contrary it is positive about funding the project. On Padma bridge, however, Okada stressed the urgency of Bangladesh negotiating with the World Bank on the pending issue and promised to talk to WB about 'how to find a solution'.

Importantly, Bangladesh side requested Japan to assist its food security efforts through construction of warehouses to preserve food for two to three years Japan agreed to consider it.

Bangladesh has two important offers for Japan on the table. The first relates to a comprehensive partnership deal; and the second has to do with an export processing zone exclusively for Japanese industries underpinned by investment in power and gas exploration for the zone.

The Japanese Deputy PM while meeting with Bangladesh Prime Minister made some important observations. He said, "Bangladesh is a country of potential and will go a long way if its potential can be properly utilised." One couldn't agree more with him. Okada also pointed out that for Japanese investment to markedly increase in Bangladesh, the problems of electricity, gas and administrative procedure will have to be overcome. The counsel needs to be heeded.

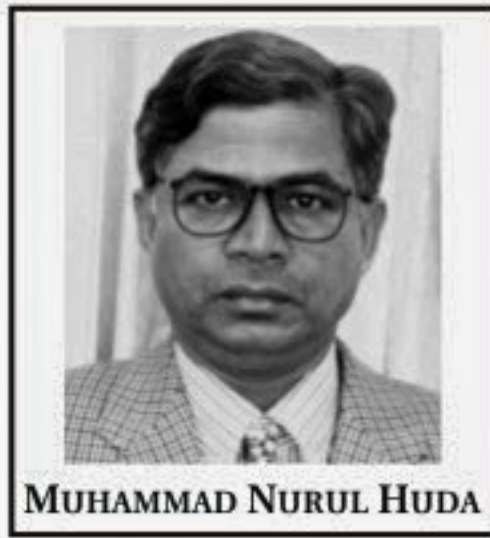
Harsher punishment for perpetrators

Will it be enough to stop river accidents?

SHIPPING Minister Shajahan Khan has come out in favour of amending existing laws to increase the penalty for river accidents. While we welcome such a step being taken, much needs to be done in other, more crucial areas, to bring about better safety measures. It usually takes a tragedy to propel authorities into action. This time round it was the news of some 147 passengers who drowned when their vessel travelling from Shariatpur to Dhaka collided with another vessel in Munishiganj on March 13. We say enough is enough! Together with raising penalties, authorities must move decisively to plug the loopholes in the system to dramatically reduce casualties in human lives on our rivers.

Indeed, if one looks at the number of areas where the laws are not only being not enforced but waved aside merrily, one cannot help but be aghast! It is hardly surprising that we witness the frequent accidents taking place on our waterways when one factors in the following data: large numbers of vessels ply the various routes lack proper design; free loading of passengers beyond capacity is a common practice; and worse of all navigators and pilots of most passenger and cargo vessels have, over time, repeatedly been found to be lacking in requisite skills or possessing mandatory licenses needed to operate such vessels. Given such appalling facts, is it not time we woke up to certain realities? That it is not a matter of amending a law here or increasing fines there; on the contrary, it has everything to do with enforcement of laws and if need be increase the strength of the regulatory authority which in this case is the Department of Shipping. It has to carry out

Enforcement hazards in a tensed up society



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

IT would appear that the Bangladesh polity is going to experience more political confrontations in the run-up to the

next general election, thus causing severe inconvenience for all segments of the population including the law-enforcers. Political thinkers, who are reputed for their time and space-transcending relevance, have pointed to the inevitable insecurity and suffering consequent upon political instability.

While the fate of the teeming masses of our country may not change due to the confrontationalist postures and actions of the mainstream politicians, the game of politics has a rewarding bearing on those who are the players.

The non-deliverance by our politicians has meant demonstration of arrogance by incumbents to somehow stay in power or fearsome manipulation on the part of opposition to grab power. In such a scenario, the country is kept on the tenterhooks and the process carries within itself multi-dimensional enforcement and security implications.

There is no denying that Bangladesh needs to be presided over by a capable, effective ruling group that can tackle aggressive and destructive forces and provide adequate protection to its citizen. Success of a politi-

cal government is significantly measured by the absence of violence and the presence of confidence of the people in addition to the element of adaptability to new conditions and challenges. In such a background, the scale of our political instability may unfortunately turn out to be the prelude to political decay.

Many factors militate against our quest for a stable political order. The military or civilianised military rule of the not-too-distant past has been a serious damper and a deficit. A political culture conducive to stability is yet

and order agency must function and also point to the directions of future national progress.

The police, as one of the administrative agencies, have a special responsibility not only to ensure the widest possible degree of individual liberty and security in terms of the constitutional guarantees but also to deal with socially disruptive forces.

The police have admittedly a difficult role, and a role that they are often called upon to perform in the most provocative and trying circumstances. The police have always had

promote the normal legal and constitutional processes in the country. It is only through these that the desired social objectives can be achieved in a democratic society.

The norms that should govern the relationship of the party in power, the individual politician and the police, have yet to be developed. The development of these norms is connected with the larger question of accountability. It is clear that among the questions which arise are the accountability of the police to the law and the State, democratic control of the police and ministerial responsibility, organisational and functional independence of the police, the statutory duties of the police under the law and executive instructions which interfere with police functioning.

Bangladeshi society remaining afflicted with divisive tendencies is unable to come up with a consensus on major national issues. Most political discourses and deliberations, unfortunately, are not characterised by logic but by politicised emotion and the principal differences have given rise to the tragic social divide.

Social cohesion would be impossible in these conditions. Enforcement becomes a nightmare in such an atmosphere of opposing push and pulls. Sheer good luck and sudden good sense may prevent us from plunging into anarchy.

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

The police have always had to handle problems of law and order. What is new in the situation today is that many of the agitations have a claim to social legitimacy because they are undertaken in furtherance of goals which are recognised by the constitution. The police, therefore, are being cast in an anti-people role.

to emerge and unfortunately the facilitating factor of level-headed leadership is in short supply.

Consequently, we have to witness a lack of social cohesion and the crippling State incapacity that is rooted in internal threats. Such deficits pose serious threat to the core values of our independence and sovereignty.

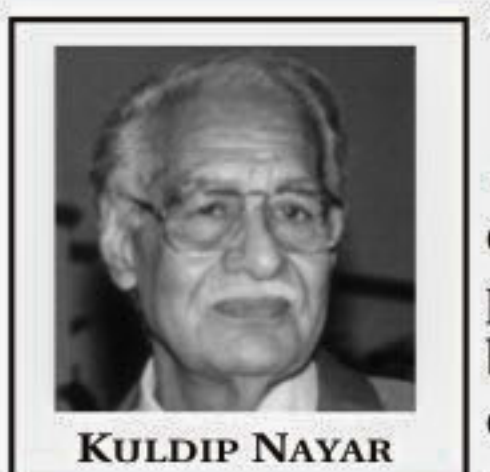
The constitutional goals and the guarantees of freedom define the political frame-work within which the administrative authority and the law

to handle problems of law and order. What is new in the situation today is that many of the agitations have a claim to social legitimacy because they are undertaken in furtherance of goals which are recognised by the constitution.

The police, therefore, are being cast in an anti-people role. Even so the police have to maintain law and order and support the constitutional processes in society. Both in a negative as well as a positive sense the police have the obligation to defend and

BETWEEN THE LINES

A window for peace



KULDIP NAYYAR

INDIA and Pakistan are seldom on the same page. Partly, it is because they carry the baggage of tragic history and

partly because they have no trust in each other. Above all, there is a general perception in India that since the army is a decisive factor in the affairs of Pakistan, it is not possible to foster any meaningful relationship until it becomes a democratic polity in the real sense. In fact, from the time General Mohammad Ayub Khan took over the reins of Pakistan in 1958, India has assumed that normalcy between the two countries is not achievable.

After becoming the Martial Law Administrator, General Ayub even offered a "joint defence pact." India's then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru spurned the offer with the remark: "Joint defence against whom?" The leaders of the two other military regimes in the seventies and later -- General Zia-ul Haq and General Pervez Musharraf -- were never taken seriously because New Delhi believed that their say from the military point of view would never allow any exercise for peace to succeed.

Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff Pervez Kayani has jolted India's past thinking by advocating "peaceful coexistence" between the two countries. But his suggestion that the civil and military leaderships should discuss ways to resolve the issue is a bit confusing. He should know that the military leadership in India is not part of the decision-making process, which is primarily in the hands of the elected representatives.

General Kayani's proposal does not stop at the Siachen Glacier. He has hinted at a follow-up and has thus

belied the impression that peace between India and Pakistan is a hostage to the army's hawkish thinking. He has given a window of opportunity which the governments on both sides should grab with both hands to normalise relations.

Unless there is a back channel working on Kayani's suggestion, New Delhi is not reacting officially. The media has by and large welcomed Kayani's proposal but otherwise the comment has been guarded. The question is whether the Indian forces would withdraw from the Siachen Glacier because President Asif Ali Zardari has rejected the unilateral withdrawal as was suggested by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

There are voices which may say: "Can we trust them?" By not trusting, both have fought three wars, apart from the Kargil incursion. Let them, for a change, trust each other. Otherwise, history will hold the present governments responsible for letting the opportunity for peace go by.

However, if Pakistan were to do so, it would put India under a lot of pressure to reciprocate. Morally, New Delhi's position would be so untenable that it would have to withdraw the forces. Even if we rule out this line of thinking, Pakistan would have to assure India that Islamabad would not try to occupy the vacant area if and when New Delhi withdrew. After all, when India sent its troops to Siachen Glacier in 1984, it suspected that Pakistan was going to do so. (Indian intelligence agencies found that Pakistan had ordered high-altitude mountaineering gears from a London trader who used the supply the same to New Delhi.)

Whatever Pakistan decides, it has to

have the nod of General Kayani. He cannot go against the wishes of the Pakistani people who want peace with India. General Kayani can neither be oblivious to the fact that a military takeover in Pakistan is well-nigh impossible when all political parties have now joined hands to uphold the dictum of democratic change.

I wish the reaction in India had been more forthcoming. There is a long dreary period of mistrust. But it has to be dispelled by sitting across the table and not putting any conditions before doing so. General Kayani has mentioned all outstanding problems between the two countries which need to be put on the table for solution.

The starting point can be the

Siachen Glacier as General Kayani's remarks indicate. After visiting the sites where 180 Pakistani soldiers were buried in snow he was moved, and saw the futility of perching his forces at a height of some 23,000 feet. The same is the case with India, which too had lost hundreds of soldiers at the Siachen Glacier over a period time. But the main worry is that what happens when its forces withdraw from the glacier?

The solution to Siachen Glacier should present no problems because both sides have gone over the details in the last several years. There was a time when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had initiated a settlement, agreeing to a no-man land status. But the signatures could not take place

because some Indian army commanders had a different point of view. They saw some strategic advantage which some others commanders dispute. If the Line of Control could be delineated after the Shimla Conference up to the area near the glacier, the same line can be extended right up to the end. Otherwise, the two sides will continue to pay a heavy price in terms of soldiers and logistics. Once again it is distrust which rules out an agreement.

The climate for a dialogue on all problems is conducive. People on both sides want it. General Kayani said that the army understood well the need to bring down the defence budget, adding: "We would like to spend less on defence" because ultimately "security doesn't only mean secure border but also the welfare of the people." This means that the army is ready to take cuts. This also means the reduction of troops on the border.

The solutions to Siachen Glacier and Sir Creek, which Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has said are "do-able," will create an atmosphere of give and take, and it is quite on the cards that some way out may be found to solve Kashmir. Most important is that the aperture of peace should not be allowed to be shut with both sides going to the maximum limit in accommodating each other. If General Kayani, a soldier and not a politician, can talk of permanent peace between the two countries why can't the rulers?

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The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 5

1260 Kublai Khan becomes ruler of the Mongol Empire.

1494 Christopher Columbus lands on the island of Jamaica and claims it for Spain.

1809 Mary Kies becomes the first woman awarded a US patent, for a technique of weaving straw with silk and thread.

1821 Emperor Napoleon I dies in exile on the island of Saint Helena in the South Atlantic Ocean.

1877 Indian Wars: Sitting Bull leads his band of Lakota into Canada to avoid harassment by the United States Army under Colonel Nelson Miles.

1946 The International Military Tribunal for the Far East begins in Tokyo with twenty-eight Japanese military and government officials accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity.