

STRAIGHT LINE

The recurrent affliction

Thinking anew on Padma Bridge

Angry reactions will not help

IT was an angry prime minister who spoke on Wednesday in parliament. She had reasons to be angry. The World Bank's (WB) cancellation has not only thrown into uncertainty the project that would have given her tremendous mileage in the next election but the action has also brought her government into disrepute both within the country and abroad.

As we have argued earlier, this debacle was easily avoidable. Not taking the WB's findings seriously was a serious mistake. Even if they were found to be unsubstantial, the government could have cleared all obstacles that lay in the path of implementing the project and through its own genuine investigation could have cleared the name of the said minister and others and reinstated them with honour later, even during the lifetime of the project itself. That way the WB could have been made to eat its own words. But we opted to brush aside the WB's allegations from the word go, and when we did decide to respond we did so inadequately and never touching the minister who was allegedly at the centre of it all.

For us to suddenly discover how corrupt the WB is does not serve any purpose. Why haven't we done so before? If we have evidence of the bank's corruption we should place it before its governing bodies. As a Member State of the WB we have every right to do so. Let us make one thing clear. If we still think that the WB's decision was based on unjustifiable grounds we can put our "evidence" before it to exonerate ourselves.

The way to move forward is not to react angrily but intelligently. It should be in a manner that will resume the project and restore government's image. We think negotiations can be opened with a completely new approach with people at the helm whose reputation is beyond reproach.

Nato supply route set to reopen

Pakistan takes a calculated risk

AFTER more than seven months of closure of the Nato supply route to Afghanistan following US drone attack killing 24 Pakistani soldiers, the standoff between Washington and Islamabad is about to end. In the sequel to bin Laden's killing on the soil of Pakistan, the drone attack left Pak-US relations touching a new low.

Much that Islamabad had been insistent on the USA seeking an apology for the November attack, the former would merely express regrets. Furthermore, the US-Nato investigations claimed the killings were because of mistakes on both sides.

Against this backdrop, ice melted as US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar to say 'sorry' for the death of 24 Pakistani soldiers in the November air strike. Obviously, it came as a face-saver. Practically, however, there is hardly any scope for dramatising the apparent change of heart. Obviously, intense bilateral negotiations preceded Hillary's phone call overture.

The underlying truth is the compulsion on the part of the US to operate the Nato supply route, the key strategic logistical passage to Afghanistan crucial to its fight against Taliban. Pakistan too has had its own compelling reasons as Washington released about US\$ 1.1 billion in aid to the Pakistani military. It goes as part of the 'coalition support fund designed to reimburse Pakistan for the cost of counter-insurgency operations.'

Not surprisingly, Pakistani Taliban issued a threat that they would attack the supply trucks and kill the drivers if the ferrying of supplies to Afghanistan is resumed.

The deal has come in for sharp criticism from opposition leader Imran Khan who termed it 'unacceptable' on the ground that the US still continued to carry out drone strikes on Pakistani soil. The issue remains a



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE Daily Star editorial of July 2 on extra-judicial killings makes horrendous reading because it says that such killings in the first

half of the current year stands at a staggering 63. The pattern of such deaths also seems to be consistently extensive. There is understandable concern at the sliding human rights scenario as law enforcers appear to be law breakers.

The compounding tragedy, according to media reports, is that while grisly murders are remaining unsolved, the public entertain serious doubts about the netting of actual criminals. The suspicion is that dangerous criminals are roaming around with impunity or are being shielded. The sense of insecurity among the weak and the vulnerable, calls for effective attention of the custodians of law.

It would appear that as a polity we are finding it difficult to get out of the extra-judicial mode that has set in since quite sometime. While there is realisation that extra-judicial deaths are a slap on the rule of law and are condemnable yet the efforts to put things on the right track have been distressingly slow. It is, therefore, once again necessary to go into the causes of the aberration and deliberate on the remedial measures.

Corrective actions to stall and deter patently illegal acts like deaths in authority's custody or the extra-judicial killing have come late, one

has to admit. The belated actions, caused principally by the outcry in the media and vehement protests of the civil society, while not being a matter of comfort to concerned citizens, should prompt us to venture into the state of mind and circumstances that have contributed to the building of a lamentable extra-judicial mindset.

The question as to why lawmen resort to short-cut and extra-legal

of society and state. The question is, have our enforcement leaders and their political controllers made visible efforts to halt this kind of drift?

There are also occasions when situations of grave emergency create a scenario wherein demands of order override those of liberty. Some say that the safety of the people is the highest law and, as such, in grave situations, special emergency mea-

they may be illusory. In fact, our expectations, compatible with the rule of law, of the police are at total variance with our actual expectations compatible with the rule of order. This double standard makes one believe that police's chief value lies in efficient enforcement of the prohibitive norms of substantive criminal law.

The issue of police modernisation becomes relevant when we witness our lawmen indulging in third degree methods. Don't we appreciate that the so-called efficient and traditional police force will not do and that, like the defence services, it should be equipped with modern equipment and staffed with desirable people? How long shall we put up with an outfit that appears largely to by-pass the constructive impulses of science and technology?

It needs to be impressed once again that the practice of breaking the law in the name of law enforcement is totally unacceptable and intolerable and has no place in a democratic society governed by the rule of law. It is objectionable because it is arbitrary as a process and random in its effects. A democratic polity venturing to maintain order by repression and criminality is actually creating ultimate disorder because in so doing it creates a link between social order and atrocities.

Law enforcement is a field of activity in which interaction between the world of the powerful and the world of the powerless are manifested. Hence, we have to ensure that law enforcement emphasises principles of purpose and principles of values. We must come out of the degrading thought that those who cannot be taken care of within the ambit of law have to be dealt beyond the law.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

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methods in their statutory functions should, at the least, be a subject of intellectual curiosity. Is it ambiguous legislation, vulnerability to legal sanctions, occupational culture and pressure to produce quick results? Does the malfunctioning of the criminal justice system push people to expect, nay demand, of the police to take laws in their own hands, especially when dealing with the dreaded terrorists and hard-core criminals?

It is not uncommon to hear in our situation demands for ruthless counter measures irrespective of the price that has to be paid in terms of human rights. Thus, abuses of authority in such situations can flourish not only due to official negligence or acquiescence but because, rightly or wrongly, broad sections of people consider that in spite of their excesses the police are carrying out an important and unpleasant task for the preservation

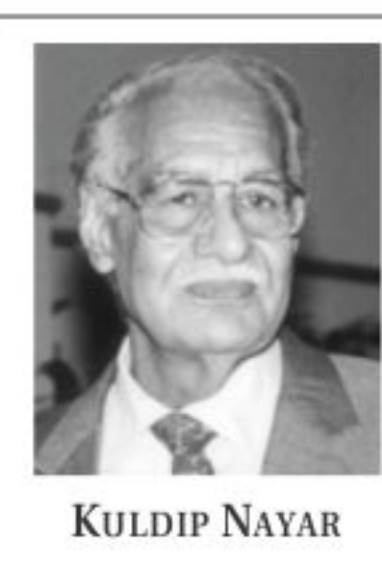
sure have to be adopted curtailing rights of the people. The issue is whether our political leaders realise that even in times of emergency there are certain non-derogable rights to life and liberty, freedom from torture, etc.

One has to ask if in Bangladesh lawless police officers are in demand when lawlessness and disorder prevail in any area. Are believers in the rule of law and followers of straight legal methods considered to be "cows" and "sissies" and are not adjudged fit enough to deal with explosive situations because a police officer working within the limits of rule of law needs to put in sustained efforts to achieve durable results?

Experience shows that a lawful police officer succeeds in displaying substantial results in the long-run but most people are interested in short-term, spectacular results even though

BETWEEN THE LINES

New beginning for Manmohan Singh



KULDIP NAYAR

I am probably among the very few who still have faith in the capability of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to take India out of the

economic morass in which it is stuck. I do not like his World Bank-guided model. Yet he has given the country a growth rate of 8% to 9% in a decade and more than doubled the Hindu growth rate of 3.5%, our cumulative performance since independence in August 1947.

True, the prime minister has come a long way from his report on South-South Cooperation, a definitive work which reflected a left-of-centre approach, something akin to the socialist pattern of society that Jawaharlal Nehru had enunciated. But Manmohan Singh defends his reforms as pragmatic, suited to India's genius. The end result has been a huge distance between the rich and the poor. He now talks of "inclusive growth" but he has been stuck there for a long time, although he has sold the idea to his admiring followers in the West. To President Barack Obama, he is still a "guru."

Whether Manmohan Singh will succeed in giving a new direction to India's economy is yet to be seen. However, there are difficulties in his way. He is the god that has failed. His credibility to set things right has got eroded. Investors from abroad and from within the country are demanding a pound of flesh. Inflation is high and fiscal deficit looks unbridgeable. People are too used to subsidies and they would not take a cut lightly.

On the other hand, one major impediment has lessened. Congress President Sonia Gandhi, who was not

allowing certain reforms, has withdrawn her objection to them. Her backseat driving has cost Manmohan Singh dear. He has lost the image of purity he once enjoyed. There is the general belief that he connived at the various scams. That he knew about the mobiles (2G spectrum) corruption running into hundreds of crores and did not interfere to stop it is taken for granted. The resignation by Agricultural Minister Sharad Pawar from the chairmanship of the Group of Ministers looking into the 2G scandal is a healthy development. No report emanating from him would have been considered fair and untainted.

Economic reforms may be important, but more important is the people's feeling that the government is just and cares for them. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh can begin from this note.

Such resignations, probably suggested, and the exit of Pranab Mukherjee who could not have done worse than he did as finance minister, give more leeway to Manmohan Singh. The only thing expected from him is to lead the process of recovery, made more difficult because of monsoon's failure in some parts of the country. Also Sonia Gandhi is still looking over his shoulders.

Since he would be grappling with many problems, he would expect support and understanding from his own party, the allies in the coalition the Congress leads, and even the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in the opposition. The latter has offered help on certain reforms but its contention is that the Congress party is itself divided over some of the steps contemplated. This was the BJP's position even in the budget session of parliament but the Congress was then not

prepared to bite the bullet.

The real problem that Manmohan Singh faces is the government's ally, Trinamool Congress headed by mercurial Mamata Banerjee. She, in fact, humiliated the prime minister by naming him as a candidate for the office of the president of India. After meeting Sonia Gandhi, she and the other ally of the government, Mulayam Singh of Samajwadi Party from UP, proposed his name -- kicking Manmohan Singh upstairs. Sonia Gandhi should have retorted immediately to the suggestion and issued a statement saying there was no question of changing Manmohan Singh as the prime minister. She allowed the

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confusion to prevail for 24 hours, humiliating Manmohan Singh further.

I do not know why the prime minister is saying every now and then that he is willing to vacate his place for Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi's son. Manmohan Singh should know by this time, having been in the Congress for 25 years, that whenever Sonia Gandhi decides, she would not even ask him why she is putting her son in his place. At present, Rahul's image is down because of the battering of the Congress in Bihar and UP, the two states where he campaigned during the Assembly elections. He would need some time to refurbish his appeal.

Besides giving direction to the matters of economy, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh should show that he is really in command of the country. He should have publicly asked for a report on the killing of "Naxalites" who, human rights activists allege,

were innocent villagers. In fact, he should have ordered a judicial inquiry straightaway to verify the facts because the police has the reputation of being gun crazy. The wobbling Home Minister P. Chidambaram is not known for quick decision.

Coming to the issue of prisoners in India and Pakistan, the prime minister should have taken the matter in his own hands when Pakistan released Surjeet Singh and not Sarabjit Singh, as was announced earlier. Many television channels from Pakistan informed me about Sarabjit's release and got my reaction. Apparently, the hardliners made Islamabad change its decision. The prime minister should have taken up the matter at his level because the relationship between the two countries is getting affected by the "mistaken identity," if it was so.

One thing that comes out clearly from the recent confusion is that prisoners on both sides are considered mere pawns on a chessboard and are kept in jail beyond the tenure of the sentence to play the opportunistic game. Surjeet Singh, who has been released, spent nearly 10 years more because that is the practice. None bothers on both sides about human sufferings. None is accountable and nobody is taken to task for detaining prisoners illegally.

In India, there are examples where its own prisoners are in jail even if they have served their sentence. For example, I would like to know the fate of Sikh prisoners languishing in jail since 1984. Had the government shown agility, the prisoners would have been released by this time.

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The writer is an eminent Indian Columnist.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 7

- 1456**
A retrial verdict acquits Joan of Arc of heresy 25 years after her death.
- 1770**
The Battle of Larga between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire takes place.
- 1953**
Ernesto "Che" Guevara sets out on a trip through Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador.
- 1954**
Elvis Presley made his radio debut when WHBQ Memphis played his first recording for Sun Records, "That's All Right."
- 1980**
Institution of sharia in Iran.
- 1997**
The Turkish Armed Forces withdraw from northern Iraq after assisting the Kurdistan Democratic Party in the Iraqi Kurdish Civil War.
- 2005**
A series of four explosions occurs on London's transport system killing 56 people including four alleged suicide bombers and injuring over 700 others.