

## SUNDAY POUCH

## Relocation of tanneries to Savar in limbo

### Owners' demand for compensation unfair

IT is astonishing that more than a decade since the passing of a High Court ruling which ordered the relocation of all tanneries from Hazaribagh to Savar nothing has materialised. True the work on the central effluent treatment plant (CETP) remains unfinished, but that no preparatory work has been done by a single tannery to relocate till date goes to show bad faith of the industry in this regard.

It is morally reprehensible that factory owners are demanding a compensation to the tune of Tk110 billion for relocating. It is even more so when the entire infrastructure including 200 industrial plots over a 200 acre area in Savar allotted specifically for the purpose, except the CETP, have been provided free of cost. Under the circumstances, it is they who should be compensating the nation for the damage done to the Buriganga, the lifeline of the city, rather than them asking for compensation.

According to a recent Environment Impact Assessment Study published in the International Journal of Environmental Science and Development in April, 2012 Hazaribagh, which is the largest tannery region in Bangladesh consisting of more than 200 tanneries generate an approximate 7.7 million litres of liquid waste and 88 million tons of solid waste every day. The direct discharge of these wastes has contaminated the ground and surface water with dangerously high concentrations of chromium, as well as cadmium, arsenic and lead.

Hazaribagh tanneries to the environmental damage to both eco-systems of the Buriganga River and food chain is well-documented. Yet, for inexplicable reasons the government has so far been unable to make headway with the sector to relocate. The whole project has been in limbo with industry failing to come to terms with the government to share costs on the CETP project. It is imperative that the industry understand the need to move forward on the issue, and not to find excuses for delay, because unless the CETP is up and running, leather goods from Bangladesh will be barred entry into developed countries including the European Union, putting into jeopardy a Tk62 billion export market.

## Construction work hindered

### Blatant misuse of political clout

IF a picture speaks a thousand words than the two pictures appearing in this paper's back page on Saturday speak volumes about how even the administration is helpless against party clout. The pictures show the interrupted construction work of a pavement in south Tejgaon in the capital, reportedly, because in the way stand various offices of a political party. And the DCC does not have the nerve to remove them because most of them happen to belong to party appendages of the ruling Awami League.

The spots these offices occupy are public property and this is fairly representative of the general picture of illegal occupation of public land by ruling party activists. And this behaviour is not restricted to any particular regime. We have seen this happen during every regime, and continue to happen, with impunity.

It is, however, even more worrisome when the administration seems helpless, or unwilling, to take necessary action to remove the illegal structures. We have seen instances where demolition of illegal structures by the DCC or RAJUK had to be called off, or illegal occupation of playgrounds or public places could not be vacated, because those in illegal occupation were linked to the ruling party.

We find this situation rather reprehensible. We feel that not only the area in question in the said picture but all other spots or areas that houses illegal structures belonging to political parties or their affiliate bodies must be cleared. Public places belong to the public and it seems odious that political parties that foam in the mouth talking about serving the people would act in a manner which hampers the services provided to the community.

Public institutions must uphold public interest. The illegal occupations must not only be vacated but necessary action must also be taken against those in illegal

# Bengali babu in Rashtrapati Bhavan!



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

LAST week, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee took up residence in Rashtrapati Bhavan. He will reside there for the next five years and if

health permits (he is 76 years now), and if he remains popular, he could be re-elected for another term. He is none other than the famous "Political Mr. Fix it" of India. Till his election as the president of India he was the finance minister. He thus became the first Bengali in history to be the president of India.

Pranab Mukherjee is a Hindu and a high caste Brahmin. He was born in Birbhum district of West Bengal. Diminutive in size, he often has to use a stool to stand up from behind any podium to be seen by his audience. But his political stature has always been large. When the dour Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee was asked recently about her views of Pranab as the new president of India, she exclaimed that he was not a son of Bengal but "a son of the world."

To Indians everywhere, Pranab is a Bengali *babu* and a "quintessential *bhadralok* (gentleman)." He speaks English with a heavy Bengali accent which his colleagues call "Pranabese." In every cultural sense he is a Bengali. But his political roots were never in his birthplace, the state of West Bengal. Although ethnically a Bengali, he remained a man of the centre politically, with roots firmly in Delhi.

In his early life Pranab had to walk several miles each day through mud and dirt to reach his school. He graduated later in politics and history from Kolkata University to become a school teacher and a journalist, before he entered politics in 1969. Initially, he joined as a member of the Upper House. Subsequently, he joined the maelstrom of the Lower House. As a member of the Indian legislature he has spent 43 long years. But what is

astounding is that he had also been a minister of the government for over 39 years. Whenever the Congress party, to which he belonged, was in power he was given a ministerial assignment. In the course of his long political career he held the important portfolios of defense, foreign affairs, commerce and finance at some time or the other. Now he is the elected president of his country.

To the people of West Bengal all this matters. The tallest Congress leader before Pranab had been Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy. He was the chief minister of West Bengal from 1948 to 1962. Roy

political infighting, about political grievances as well as political aspirations of all the parties, groups and factions in India, he was always there to fix things up for the Congress high command. As an encyclopedia of Indian politics he made his points clear in any negotiation without being overpowering. Indeed, for years he played this unique role of a "conciliator" in national politics. His staunch championship of "inclusive growth," i.e. India's teeming poor should share in its rapid development, also made him the darling of many.

So, as the president of India, what

standing bilateral issues with Bangladesh. He is well conversant with the matters that bedevil friendly relations between the two countries. Under Prime Minister Manmohan he was the chief interlocutor with Bangladesh. So, with him in the highest office, there is hope that if he takes the initiative the pace of bilateral negotiations could quicken.

But do not forget that Pranab Mukherjee has not always been good news for Bangladesh. In the past he has often acted in an enigmatic manner and passed up opportunities that could have resolved bilateral problems. By showing deference to the opinions of bureaucrats he had not allowed his sharp political sense to lead the way.

So a Bengali in Rashtrapati Bhavan may not necessarily be an advantage for Bangladesh. Yet the taste of the pudding would be in the eating. Pranab Babu has close personal connection with our prime minister. During his last visit to Dhaka he also spent some time talking with our leader of the opposition. His wife comes from the Jessore district in Bangladesh. In a manner one can say that Pranab Babu is our son-in law. But that may not have any impact in real-politik.

As a true Bengali, the president is a lover of *mishti* (sweets). He craves for them after each meal -- breakfast, lunch and dinner. He will always ask his wife after a meal "*mishti kothay?*" (where are the sweets?). It is she who keeps plates of sweets available for him everyday. Maybe next time he takes his sweets it will remind him of his native West Bengal as well as the problems that he left unresolved in neighbouring Bangladesh.

But for the present, we felicitate Pranab Babu on assuming this highest office in India. We hope he can find time soon to make a state visit to Bangladesh. Our *bonde, mihidana, balushahi* and *rabri*, which are some of his favourite sweets, will be waiting for him when he is here.

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*The president of India has a diplomatic role too, apart from his legislative, judicial, military and financial functions. It is here that Pranab Babu can play a role in resolving some outstanding bilateral issues with Bangladesh. So, with him in the highest office, there is hope that if he takes the initiative the pace of bilateral negotiations could quicken.*

is credited as the man who gave the state post independence economic development. He built the Durgapur Steel Mills, the Farraka Barrage and Salt Lake city. The only other person who came close to this great chief minister was A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhury, a Muslim from Malda district who was the railway minister. But Ghani's contribution was confined mainly to the economic development of Malda district.

In contrast, Pranab Mukherjee, as an important national leader, did not ever leverage his enormous political clout for the economic development of his native West Bengal. He collaborated more with the government at the centre. He got what he wanted, by playing by the rules set by lesser beings in Delhi. In West Bengal, Pranab is therefore taken more as an oddball.

But that did not diminish Pranab in any way. At the centre he was likened by many as a Congress "fire fighter." Since he had deep knowledge about

role is he likely to play now?

The president of India is nothing more than a titular head of the state. He has to perform a variety of ceremonial functions. But under Article 53 of the Indian Constitution, the president has the right to be informed of all the nation's affairs. He has also the right to appoint and remove high constitutional authorities, including the prime minister and the ministers. So, in case of a political impasse after national elections, he will have the final say on which party will form the next government. Today, with regional parties becoming stronger, the next elections could see some radical shifts in political power at the centre. Pranab Babu may have to be adroit in determining which party or which alliance would form the next government in 2014.

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## | The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

# Turkey's human-rights hypocrisy

TANER AKCAM

A new political order is emerging in the Middle East, and Turkey aspires to be its leader by taking a stand against authoritarian regimes. Earlier this week Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan went so far as to denounce the Syrian government's continuing massacres of civilians as "attempted genocide."

Turkey's desire to champion human rights in the region is a welcome development, but Erdogan's condemnation of Syria is remarkably hypocritical. As long as Turkey continues to deny crimes committed against non-Turks in the early 1900s, during the final years of the Ottoman Empire, its calls for freedom, justice and humanitarian values will ring false.

Turkey's attempt to cultivate an image as the global protector of Muslim rights is compromised by a legacy of ethnic cleansing and genocide against Christians and terror against Arabs and Kurds. Memories of these crimes are very much alive throughout former Ottoman territories. Syria and Lebanon both observe May 6 as Martyrs' Day in memory of the Arab nationalists who revolted against Ottoman rule and were publicly executed on that day in 1916. Turkey cannot serve as a democratic model until it acknowledges that brutal violence, population transfers and genocide underlie the modern Turkish state.

I have dedicated my scholarly career to documenting the late-Ottoman policy of Turkification between 1913 and 1918. Using documents from the Ottoman government archives in

Istanbul, which were once classified as top secret, I have sought to pull back the veil on Turkey's century of denial. These documents clearly demonstrate that Ottoman demographic policy from 1913 to 1918 was genocidal. Indeed, the phrase "crimes against humanity" was coined as a legal term and first used on May 24, 1915, in response to the genocide against Armenians and other Christian civilians.

This is common knowledge, but what is not commonly known is that the expression was first drafted as "crimes against Christianity." Britain, France and Russia initially defined Ottoman atrocities as "crimes against Christianity," but later substituted "humanity" after considering the negative reaction that such a specific term could elicit from Muslims in their colonies.

Today, Erdogan is seeking to be a global spokesman for Muslim values. In June 2011 he told thousands gathered to celebrate the landslide victory of his Justice and Development Party, known as the A.K.P.: "Sarajevo won today as much as Istanbul, Beirut won as much as Izmir, Damascus won as much as Ankara. Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza won as much as Diyarbakir."

Speaking in support of oppressed Muslims has earned him popularity. If Erdogan aspires to defend freedom and democracy in the region, however, he must also address the legitimate fears of Christians in the Middle East. As the European powers opted for universalism in 1915 by denouncing "crimes against humanity," Erdogan

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must move beyond his narrow focus on "crimes against Muslims." All oppressed peoples deserve protection.

It isn't a coincidence that many Christians and other minorities in Syria support Bashar al-Assad's Baath Party: They are willing to sacrifice freedom for security. While Turkish rhetoric appeals to the Sunni Muslim majority's demand for freedom in Syria, it does not relieve Syrian Christians' anxiety about their future. On the contrary, Syrian Christians listening to Erdogan and his Islamist rhetoric are reminded of 1915, and that makes Turkey look very much like a security threat to them.

This is not a religious or ethnic issue, but a struggle between supporters of dictatorial regimes and those demanding democracy and human rights. Confronting the past is closely linked to security, stability and democracy in the Middle East. Persistent denial of

historical injustices not only impedes democratisation but also hampers stable relations between different ethnic and religious groups.

This is particularly true in former Ottoman lands, where people view one another in the cloaks of their ancestors. In addition to the reverberations of the Armenian genocide, mass crimes against Kurds and Alevis in Turkey, violence against Kurds and Arabs in Iraq, and Christian-Muslim tensions in Syria and Lebanon continue to poison contemporary politics.

The popularity of the A.K.P. in Turkey and the Muslim world affords Erdogan an opportunity to usher in an era of tolerance. By acknowledging the genocide against Christians and crimes against other groups, the Turks can become leaders in the realm of human rights. Turkey's efforts to paint itself as a beacon of freedom and democracy will fail, however, so long as Turkey refuses to atone for Ottoman sins.

Moral purists and hard-nosed realists mistakenly believe that pursuing justice and national interests are mutually exclusive, but acknowledging historical wrongs is not a zero-sum game.

In the Middle East the past is the present. Truth and reconciliation are integral to establishing a new, stable regional order founded on respect for human rights and dignity. Turkey should lead by example.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 29

**1921** Adolf Hitler becomes leader of the National Socialist German Workers Party.

**1948** Olympic Games: The Games of the XIV Olympiad after a hiatus of 12 years caused by World War II, the first Summer Olympics to be held since the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, open in London.

**1957** The International Atomic Energy Agency is established.

**1965** Vietnam War: the first 4,000 101st Airborne Division paratroopers arrive in Vietnam, landing at Cam Ranh Bay.

**1987** Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi and President of Sri Lanka J. R. Jayawardene sign the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord on ethnic issues.

**1993** The Israeli Supreme Court acquits alleged Nazi death camp guard John Demjanjuk of all charges and he is set free.