

## A growing hiatus in society

*A trend we should guard against*

**P**OLARISATION in the society is increasingly becoming a cause for concern. It began with the media and social media campaign against members and especially bloggers involved in the Shahbagh movement demanding maximum punishment for the war criminals and banning of Jamaat-e-Islami, leading to the death of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider in February and, more recently, the attempted murder of blogger Asif Mohiuddin. It has now evolved into outright terrorism and violence. Attacks on minority communities around the country have been shocking and deplorable, to say the least. The recent attacks on the police, the arrest of the Islami Chhatra Shibir president for his alleged involvement in them, the calling of a nationwide hartal first by Shibir and then endorsed by the BNP-led 18-party alliance protesting the arrest, all threaten civic peace. Just as brutal attack against the police is reprehensible so is the excessive use of force by law enforcers.

Now, four Islamist parties led by Hefajat-e-Islam have announced a long march, again, supported by the BNP and Jatiya Party -- the latter a member of the ruling alliance -- in what is feared to be yet another attempt to cash in on people's religious sentiments.

Threats, intimidation and violence are not the language of politics. Neither are they the ideals of the religion which the abovementioned groups claim to uphold. While insults to any religion will not be tolerated, the government must be careful not to encourage intolerance. Rather, it should be concerned about the violence taking place in the name of religion which has become a serious threat to public order and come up with ways to counter it effectively.

We are divided enough as a nation politically without adding religion to the mix, which can never fare well, especially when the concoction is for purposes of gaining and abusing power. It is important that we draw the correct divide between personal belief and emotion and national politics -- not between the people.

## Tigers' fine performance in Sri Lanka

*Showing signs of growing*

**A**LTHOUGH the Tiger's trip of Sri Lanka ended on a losing note we think the Bangladesh boys can take pride in the way they have performed during the entire tour. We congratulate the Bangladesh team and all those associated with them on their performance. The last encounter between the two, battled out for the honors of the only T-20 match, was a much closer encounter than the 17 run-deficit suggests. Had it not been from some bad decisions going against Bangladesh the men in dark green might have carried the day. However, Bangladesh were not as good with the ball or in the fielding department on that particular evening. But that is in the realm of 'ifs' and 'buts'. One should much rather look at the positives.

That Bangladesh is no longer a pushover has been amply demonstrated in this tour which was plagued by injuries from the start. One was very impressed by the confidence that the team exuded as a group. And that the middle order did not wilt after two consecutive poor starts, as they had been wont to in not too distant a past, is something that is comforting for all.

The first test match was a team effort excelled in all fields. Apart from the fact that the highest team score in Bangladesh's test match history was notched up in Galle there were some individual records too by Mushfiqur and Ashraf. And to score more than three runs per over in a test match is a creditable performance which any test team can take pride in. It is a pity though that the first test performance could not be replicated in the second. But the ODI honors were shared after a resounding win in the third, the second having been rained off.

We feel the team has matured and we have more technically proficient players. The time has come to build on this.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 2

- 1912

The ill fated RMS Titanic begins sea trials.
- 1917

World War I: President Woodrow Wilson asks the U.S. Congress for a declaration of war on Germany.
- 1921

The Autonomous Government of Khorasan, a military government encompassing the modern state of Iran, is established.
- 1975

Vietnam War: Thousands of civilian refugees flee from the Quang Ngai Province in front of advancing North Vietnamese troops.
- 1982

Falklands War: Argentina invades the Falkland Islands.
- 1989

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev arrives in Havana, Cuba to meet with Fidel Castro in an attempt to mend strained relations.
- 2002

Israeli forces surround the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem into which armed Palestinians had retreated. A siege ensues.
- 2004

Islamist terrorists involved in the 11 March 2004 Madrid attacks attempt to bomb the Spanish high-speed train AVE near Madrid. Their attack is thwarted.

# Largest power project in limbo



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

**F**OUR years ago, a joint communiqué was issued by Bangladesh and Indian governments to set up a joint-venture company that would produce 1,320 megawatts (MW) of power from the single largest coal-fired power plant in Bangladesh. The contract was between Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) and India's National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) in January, 2012, and value of the deal stood at \$1.5billion.

The whole idea behind this ambitious project was to open up an era of "energy cooperation" between neighbouring countries. The initial euphoria over the deal has since died down somewhat as negotiations hit snag after snag. Principal points of contention, as time has revealed, revolve around a number of key issues. External financing, a vital prerequisite to getting a project of this magnitude off the ground, has not been forthcoming as initially anticipated. What is now clearly obvious is that conditions agreed upon by Bangladeshi official were not thoroughly or extensively scrutinised prior to signing of contract, particularly when it comes to the terms of buyer's credit. Interest for buyer's credit is significantly higher than the soft loans offered by bilateral or multilateral agencies. Hence, cost of electricity generated from the plant (when it comes online) will naturally be much higher than originally anticipated.

The fact that the Rampal power project was contracted on the basis of a conceptual study in itself is a major departure from standard operating procedure. Questions have been raised in the media about whether the issues of supply of coal and the actual cost of producing per kilowatt electricity were, in fact, thor-



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oughly studied beforehand. As things stand now, it would appear the decision to go for the project was based on political considerations and not on economic realities. Even if we were to leave aside the issue of coal sourcing, how could such a major project be undertaken without assuring finance and the environmental impact mitigations on the mangrove forest (14 km away from the Sundarbans) of Sundarbans? This is a particularly touchy issue as climatic and human-induced changes have already taken their toll on the delicate biodiversity of the mangrove forest. The so-called study carried out by BPDB lacks credibility and it is quite natural that environmental groups are up in arms. That BPDB so far failed to obtain environmental clearance from the Department of Environment is yet another major departure from the large footprint

project implementation procedure.

That there has been little progress in actual work for setting up the plant since 2012 leaves little to imagination whether the project will actually see the light of day within this government's term. Stalemate in negotiations between the parties is the reason why Bangladesh's Power Grid Company is yet to finalise the installation of transmission lines. Again, BPDB wants a 25-year agreement on power purchase and a fixed rate for it. NTPC apparently wants a yearly renewable contract.

Getting back to the issue of supply of coal, i.e. the primary fuel source for the plant, 4.5million tonnes of coal will be required to generate 1,320MW of electricity annually. Infrastructure required to import and handle this coal at site is nonexistent presently. The list of required facilities to make import

feasible is impressive. A dedicated jetty -- that is not there now and will have to be constructed. Moidara canal requires dredging since it cannot handle vessels of more than 4-meter draft and coal-carrying vessels require much more than 4-meter clearance. Dredging work for the required route up to the "proposed" jetty has not commenced. According to project consultant CEGIS, cost of dredging stands at \$105 million -- money that has not been allocated. Again, yearly maintenance of the dredged canal will require an additional \$30 million a year and no one is quite sure whether that part of the financing has been worked out. Last but not the least, current international coal prices indicate the bare minimum price per tonne of coal will be approximately \$145. Factoring in additional charges at \$27 freight charge per tonne (for import from Indonesia), we are looking at a cost of about \$172 per tonne. If Indonesian coal cannot be imported and we must turn to South African or Australian coal, cost goes up further. That puts cost of electricity per kilowatt/hr at Tk.7, as opposed to Barapukuria coal fired power plant, at Tk.4.5

From day 1, the government and other agencies handling energy issues in Bangladesh displayed a serious lack of comprehension of the magnitude the project entailed. This is why four years on, we have failed to build a coal-fired power plant. In fact, no one in the country knows why the site had to be Rampal and why not Chittagong or any other place. This was a pure exercise in amateurism. In that it has succeeded brilliantly. At every step of the way, hurdles were hit that brought the process to its knees. In the final analysis of things, if a project must be done in the Sundarbans (sometimes a trade-off is inevitable), then the least the government can do is a professional job.

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## Walking a tightrope

EDITORIAL DESK: *The Korea Herald*

**I**T is not easy to guess what North Korea is thinking when it threatens nuclear war against the South while permitting an unimpeded border crossing by employees of South Korean corporations operating factories in the North. Nor is it easy to make sense of where South Korea stands when it says it is preparing to propose dialogue and family reunions to the North while threatening a counterattack on any North Korean hostility, be it conventional or nuclear.

North Korea has been ramping up its nuclear threats against South Korea and the United States since it conducted its third nuclear test on February 12, making bellicose remarks without restraint. But its sanity is called into question when it says conditions are created for an "imminent nuclear war" and that its military action will include a "sovereignty-protecting preemptive nuclear attack."

On hearing the highly provocative and normally unimaginable remarks, China says: "We hope that relevant parties will exercise restraint so as to ease the tension." But shouldn't it have admonished the runaway communist state for its loose tongue as its sole military ally, before calling on all parties concerned to calm down?

On Tuesday, when a ceremony was held in South Korea to remember the victims of North Korea's 2010 torpedo attack on a South Korean corvette, Pyongyang said it was notifying the UN Security Council that the US and South Korean nuclear provocations had created the "conditions for an imminent nuclear war on the Korean

Peninsula." It said it had put on the highest alert its missile and long-range artillery units targeting US military bases on the mainland, Hawaii and Guam as well as military facilities in South Korea.

Pyongyang continued its nuclear threat on Wednesday, laying claim to a right to a preemptive nuclear attack for the protection of its sovereignty. It said its "real military action will include our powerful sovereignty-protecting preemptive nuclear attack."

On the same day, Pyongyang closed military channels of communication with the South, one of which it had used to guarantee the safety of South Korean commuters to the Gaeseong industrial park across the border. It cited what it called increasing US nuclear threats for closing all four channels of communication in use on the west coast. With the four others made inoperative either by a wild fire in the mountain or by a North Korean decision, the two sides have no open military channel of communication now.

When Pyongyang was heightening tension by threatening a nuclear war and cut off the military hotlines, South Korea said it was preparing to propose a reunion of separated families and reopen a long-stalled dialogue to the North. Was it out of its mind when it made those remarks?

Unification Minister Ryoo Kihl-jae said Wednesday that South Korea would propose inter-Korean dialogue and a reunion of split families at a time deemed appropriate under President Park Geun-hye's policy initiative of building trust with North Korea. He said South Korea would remain open to dialogue at any time.

Ryoo made these remarks after



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reporting to Park what measures he would take for her three-stage process of trust building. Her initiative envisions the buildup of trust by offering humanitarian aid for the North in the first stage, a low level of aid, as in agriculture and forestation, in the second stage, and finally large-scale investments in social and economic infrastructure in return for denuclearisation.

What was disconcerting about Ryoo's forthcoming proposal, however, was that he made no mention of any strings that would be attached with regard to North Korea's threat to security. This is not to say he did not mention national security. He did mention it when he said he would strike a "balance between national security and inter-

Korean economic cooperation" (a euphemism for South Korean aid for the North) and pursue a phased buildup of inter-Korean trust.

But the problem with Ryoo's proposal is that he will have no one but himself to blame if it is denounced as a policy of appeasement. It is all the more so, given that calls for inter-Korean dialogue or a family reunion have usually been sweetened with aid in the past.

The Park administration tries to walk a tightrope between the promotion of dialogue and a push for denuclearisation. But that is easier said than done, given North Korea's refusal to make good on its past denuclearisation promise.

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