

Cooperation in water management

It holds key to regional prosperity

IT is heartening to note that Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan are going to form two sub-regional alliances for cooperation in generating and sharing hydropower from their trans-boundary river waters. Spurred on by joint effort of Bangladesh and India, the idea instantly caught on with Nepal and Bhutan which have joined in. All these countries are geographically intertwined as parts of common river basins and therefore hold enormous potential for cooperation producing electricity and sharing it.

India and Bangladesh are common in both sub-regional alliances with Nepal and Bhutan being the third country in either of the two alliances. The prospective new equations among the participating countries will add a new and much-awaited dimension to regional cooperation in water management. The Ganges and Brahmaputra basins together makes for a huge untapped potential not merely in power generation and connecting it to national grids like in Europe it also holds the key to flood control. Equally important is the prospect for augmentation of lean season water flows in the lower reaches of the river systems.

Sometimes bilateral approach, let alone any unilateral move to interfere with the natural flows can bear perilous results for the countries at the receiving end. That a departure from such self-serving approaches is being made is a positive development. With this happening, regional cooperation in resource management will receive an efficacious impetus. The benign effect on environment to be derived is critical for another reason which tackling climate change that have begun to impact the whole region.

Bangladesh's selection of 20 hydropower project sites - nine in India, seven in Nepal and four in Bhutan along the Ganges and the Brahmaputra river basins augurs well. The idea is to add electricity from such sources to our national grid. Of course the proposed project sites will be finalised through intensive discussion. Here our negotiating capabilities and a spirit of give-and-take can make a huge difference to the collective and individual outcomes for the countries forming the alliances.

With such projects in the horizon, there will be dearth of international financing, that is for sure.

Errant BCL elements

Expulsion goes down as eyewash

BANGLADESH Chhatra League's (BCL) decision to expel 11 of its members for rent-seeking and assault on journalists does not go far enough in righting the wrongs. Considering the nature of the offences, the errant boys deserve much more than a mere disciplinary action from the student organisation's central body. We have seen such expulsions before, but in spite of these the misdeeds have continued.

Those elements of the ruling party's student body were found extracting money from travellers in the morning of the Bangla New Year. When some journalists asked them what were they doing, they flew into a rage and attacked and manhandled the journalists. Actually, what those boys passing for student activists were engaged in was nothing but hooliganism. Such thuggery being a criminal offence, they should have been handed over to the law enforcers and made to face justice according to the law of the land.

It is also not for first time that the wayward BCL activists have been found involved in such types of misdeeds; for they have a track record of committing campus violence, tender manipulation, indulging in admission trade and so on. As recently as in December 2012, some of their members were arrested for cruelly beating to death a youth named Biswajit of old Dhaka during an opposition-enforced road blockade.

In this paper, we have consistently condemned the violent and criminal acts of the wayward activists of this student organisation, and requested Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to rein in their rowdy elements. At a stage, even the prime minister admonished them for their violent behaviour and advised them to return to their studies, but with little effect.

But the latest incident has again demonstrated that they have hardly changed their ways. And their activities have tarnished the image of the incumbent government.

We have been repeatedly urging the government to make those elements face criminal prosecution but nothing of that sort was meted out to them. This amounted to giving them indulgence and a sense of impunity to carry

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 17

1946

Syria obtains its Independence from the French occupation.

1961

Bay of Pigs Invasion: A group of CIA financed and trained Cuban exiles lands at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba with the aim of ousting Fidel Castro.

1969

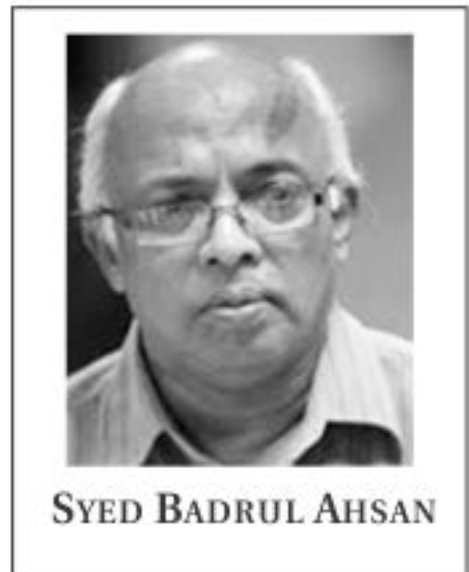
Sirhan Sirhan is convicted of assassinating Robert F. Kennedy.

1969

Czechoslovakian Communist Party chairman Alexander Dubček is deposed.

1971

The People's Republic of Bangladesh forms, under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Mujibnagar.



Ahmed and A.H.M. Quamruzzaman, you cannot but be struck by the youth in them. M.Mansur Ali was slightly older. Professor Yusuf Ali was young. Barrister Amirul Islam was younger. M.A.G. Osmany was of course a veteran in terms of age and service in the army, but all those sector commanders were young people, in their thirties. And all these people, fired by patriotic zeal, were there to wage war against the military might of an organised state. They were all patriotic Bengalis responding to the call of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. And Bangabandhu, if you remember, was a mere fifty one years old. That was youth.

In April 1971, then, the revolution that would come to be known as Bangladesh was planned, organised and led to a natural culmination by young men and women awakened to the need to reassert heritage. There were the government officers in the police and in the administration, all young Bengalis convinced that the land had to be purged of the enemy and his cloying collaborators. They made their way to Mujibnagar, to identify with the national cause. In their wake, thousands of even younger Bengalis turned their backs on home, on family, in the towns and in the villages, and marched into battle. Many of them would not return home, would

mingle with the dust and mud of the land. Many others would.

And then, in light of history happening on April 17, 1971, would come droves of artistes, journalists, doctors and academics to enlist their names to the cause. Mujibnagar would be a symbol, of everything ennobling, everything inspiring, about politics. For the first time in history, a republic formed by Bengalis and a government constituted of Bengalis were what happened in Mujibnagar.

If April 17 was the beginning of a sustained, disciplined march to liberty, the preparation for it had been made on April 10 and then on April 12. Or even earlier. Tajuddin Ahmed, having informed the world that Bangladesh was on its way, needed, in association

Mujibnagar brought all Bengalis together. Outside the occupied land of Bangladesh, Bengalis across the diaspora banded together to aid the cause back home.

with his peers in the party, to have that message of freedom go out to the world louder and clearer and without ambiguity. The world was there on April 17, at Baidyanathpota, an isolated spot of earth destined to be known as Mujibnagar. It heard the message. It felt the rumblings of a new order easing from the core of Bengal's earth.

Patriotism in its fullness defined this nation in April 1971, days before the provisional government gave shape to itself. Driven by conscience and love of country, two young Bengali diplomats in the service of Pakistan, laid themselves open and vulnerable to uncertainty on April 6 at Pakistan's diplomatic mission in India. K.M. Shehabuddin and Amjadul Haq walked away from their

jobs, informed the media of the pain of seeing their land going up in smoke at the hands of the state they had served all these years, of their moral requirement to sever all links with the aggressor state.

Shehabuddin and Haq, like everyone else drawn to the battle for Bangladesh, were heroic men in that year of endless misery and, in the end, infinite glory. There were others, Hossain Ali for instance. A day after the rise of Mujibnagar, he pulled down the Pakistan flag from Islamabad's deputy high commission in Calcutta, replaced it with the Bangladesh green-and-crimson and gave the War of Liberation yet another shot in the arm.

Beauty and reality flowed from

Mujibnagar. It was a crucial test, the very first, for men of poetry determined to transform themselves into soldiers for freedom. Poetry and politics thus were entwined in beauteous manner; and seventy five million people came together in a historic demonstration of defiance of the arrogance of hollow men and their vacuous state.

Other people in other countries spoke up for Bangladesh. George Harrison and Ravi Shankar and Joan Baez rent the skies of New York with songs of passion, lyrics that brought Bangladesh to every home in the civilised part of the globe. Songs were what the artistes of Shwadhini Bangla Betar sprinkled on the battlefields of Bangladesh, on the rain-drenched

camps of the ten million refugees across the border with India.

The war claimed lives in surefire fashion. As the Pakistan army went after unarmed, innocent civilians in the villages and towns, the guerrillas of the Mukti Bahini drove increasing fear into the heart of the enemy. The enemy feared the Mukti; Pakistan's marauding soldiers panicked as their territory shrank in slow, steady degrees.

Mujibnagar brought all Bengalis together. Outside the occupied land of Bangladesh, Bengalis across the diaspora banded together to aid the cause back home. These Bengalis, with roots in Bangladesh or West Bengal, linked hands and hearts and souls in a forceful demonstration of common ethnicity. There were Pakistanis, Malik Ghulam Jilani and Ahmed Salim for instance, who identified with the Bengali cause. Another Pakistani, in the diplomatic service of his country and shamed by the murder and mayhem caused by his nation's army, placed his services before the Mujibnagar government. Iqbal Athar would in time gain Bangladesh citizenship and serve his new country abroad with distinction.

On April 17, 1971, hope sprouted from a huge pile of despair, Jai Bangla discovered a new sense of purpose. In the name of an incarcerated Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -- Bangabandhu, Father of the Nation, Liberator, universally acknowledged leader of seventy five million Bengalis -- the war was taken to the fortress of the enemy. The citadels of the oppressors would crumble eight months later, on a winter afternoon.

It was spring back then. It is spring today.

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Tensions in Korea



In the last few weeks, there has been a notable raising of political temperature and some threatening gestures from the North have triggered renewed alarm. It is not clear why this should be so, and the secretive regime of the North has given few clues.

where, well-equipped to defend its part of the Korean peninsula. In the setting of the Cold War it enjoyed active military support from the Eastern bloc and though Russia has moved away, China remains the main bulwark of the North. China has never been ready to see a powerful external power established on its doorstep and prefers to give its support to a long-standing ally.

Notwithstanding the fierce legacy of the Korean war, the current situation would be of only limited international concern were it not for the sustained, and ultimately successful, effort of North Korea to develop nuclear weapons. This is certainly a major achievement by a country otherwise struggling and dependent on neighbouring China for the food and fuel that it seems unable fully to provide for itself. On occasion, the North has tried to develop relations with foreign countries, but only on its own terms, and not at the cost of what it would consider even the remotest threat to its security interest. Nuclear weapons give it a sense of safety in a hostile environment and stave off the fear of attack from beyond its borders. These fears may be illusory, for no other state is currently threatening the North, but they are nevertheless deeply felt and are at the core of the defence doctrine.

To emphasise the seriousness of its military concerns, North Korea has

invested heavily in developing its rocketry, and recent tests of long-range rockets have projected to the world that North Korea is not helpless against foreign aggression but can retaliate effectively even against the mightiest superpower. A parallel of sorts may be found in Pakistan, which is a notable collaborator of the North in advanced weaponry like rockets and gives priority to defence requirements above all else. Not surprisingly, ties between the North and Pakistan go deep and Pakistan's notorious AQ Khan network has been identified as a key source of the North Korean nuclear programme.

The regional risks emanating from its military programme have been used more than once by the North to bear down on others and squeeze out concessions from them. In earlier days when the North was advancing towards but yet to cross the nuclear threshold, a real sense of alarm was invoked by its nuclear programme, for the Asian East and North-East has several well-developed industrialised countries capable of taking the same path, and it was feared that what happened in the North could set in motion a whole chain of proliferation along the Pacific littoral. It did not come to that, of course, and the major powers were able to combine to maintain nuclear restraint notwithstanding the actions of the North. Subsequent crises around Korea, despite occasional naval

and other confrontations, did not have comparably unsettling effects on regional nuclear issues. The inexorable rearming of the North and its steady advance towards nuclear status did not keep Asia perpetually on tenterhooks and it began to seem that the situation was more or less contained -- not put to rest, to be sure, but unlikely to flare up without warning.

Until now. In the last few weeks, there has been a notable raising of political temperature and some threatening gestures from the North have triggered renewed alarm. It is not clear why this should be so, and the secretive regime of the North has given few clues. However, tests of long-range missiles with claimed intercontinental reach and the announcement that more tests are being planned have induced a flurry of diplomatic activity. The UN Secretary-General, himself Korean though from the South, has asked the North to desist from actions that could become uncontrollable, and he has been backed by a chorus of similar admonitions from major countries across the world. Many have the concern that there is a relatively new and untested leader in Pyongyang who may feel compelled to show his mettle and hence become unpredictable in his actions.

The US has reacted strongly and has been insistent that the situation must not be allowed to deteriorate, and that the North must be suitably curbed. Secretary of State Kerry has been crisscrossing the region to convey the message and to gain adherents for US policy. Most significantly, he appears to have obtained support from North Korea's historic patron, China. Even before Kerry reached there, China had made a statement that conveyed guarded disapproval for the unsettling actions being threatened by the North. After his meetings with Chinese leaders Kerry was able to indicate that the US and China had taken a largely common approach to the situation. This will help defuse tension. It will also be a sobering development so far as the North is concerned, for it is a rare instance of China seeking to impose restraint on its actions.

The writer is India's former Foreign Secretary.
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