

Migrants in peril

Embassy role appreciated, more expected

IT is beyond expectation that the response to a legitimate demand for unpaid wages by workers of a farm would be met with gunshots, not money. But the staff of a Greek strawberry farm committed such outrage against his Bangladeshi workers last Wednesday. As a result, some 32 workers were hurt.

According to reports, Bangladeshi workers protested and refused to join work as the owner of the farm failed to pay their salaries for over six months. Sadly though, without showing any sympathy to the plight of the workers, the owner asked them to get back to work rather than pay their dues.

And then as a sequel to an altercation between the workers and their Greek supervisors over the issue, the latter opened fire on the former leading to the injuries.

The incident is very unfortunate. Thanks to the intervention of Greece's law-enforcement department that those involved in the firing and the farm's owner have been arrested. Mercifully, Greek authorities made arrangements for treatment of the injured and also promised swift and exemplary punishment to the persons responsible for the firing.

While being appreciative of the host Greek authorities' prompt action against the errant farm owner and his staff, we would also expect that they would look into the cause of the incident and take urgent steps to address it by paying adequate compensation for the suffering workers including all their outstanding salaries.

We understand that Greece has been hard hit by debt-crisis and its falloutacute unemployment and expenditure cuts. But, given the crisis situation, more circumspection in terms of meeting the job contracts would have been in order.

Reassuringly, officials at the Bangladesh embassy in Greece informed that they would take efforts so that the Bangladeshi migrant workers may return to their jobs, or otherwise try to look for jobs elsewhere. However, they should have been more proactive about alleviating the suffering of the Bangladesh workers in Greece.

Elders lead JCD

Not a comforting thought for student leadership

THE sad truth of the matter is that the central committee of Jatiyotabadi Chatra Dal (JCD), the students' wing of the main opposition party BNP, is led essentially aging students. Going by newspaper reports on April 15, it is learnt that the BNP Chairperson has approved a new body with 291 members. Of this inflated number, more than half are married individuals who are not students but business people of various shades and hues. This, of course, is a major departure from the constitution of the JCD that states that the central body should be composed of 101 members.

The story does not end there. It is interesting to note that nearly 40 of these "leaders" have managed to keep their enrolment in various educational institutions that have dubious credentials. Then, of course, we have a handsome number of vice-presidents with ages averaging 40 or so. Looking at it from another angle, many of these senior men severed their links with education over a decade ago. Yet, they manage to remain "students for life" and hence invariably find a way to retain their positions in the students' body.

The argument for such a huge committee is that JCD has, over the years, fragmented into several factions that have rendered the body ineffective to lead agitation programmes on the streets. It is little wonder that such violation of the constitution has lead to mass dissatisfaction at the field level. Party activists at the grassroots naturally prefer bona fide students to lead the central committee. Such gross violation of rules has neither helped JCD to become a more cohesive political force, nor has it worked in favour of bridging the gap between the central

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- April 20
- 1453

The last naval battle in Byzantine history occurs, as three Genoese galleys escorting a Byzantine transport fight their way through the huge Ottoman blockade fleet and into the Golden Horn.
- 1792

France declares war against the "King of Hungary and Bohemia", the beginning of French Revolutionary Wars.
- 1828

René Caillié becomes the first non-Muslim to enter Timbuctou.
- 1945

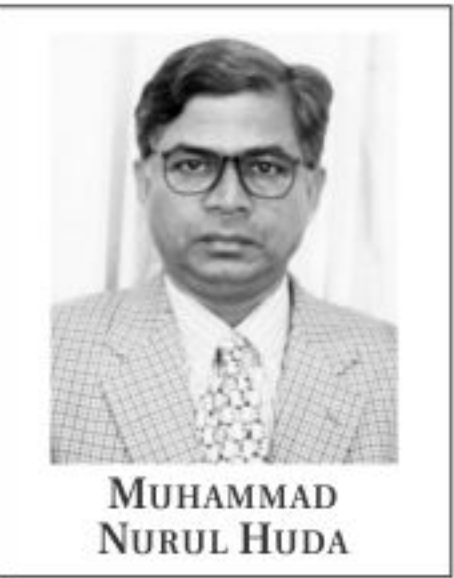
World War II: Fuehrerbunker: Adolf Hitler makes his last trip to the surface to award Iron Crosses to boy soldiers of the Hitler Youth.
- 1946

The League of Nations officially dissolves, giving most of its power to the United Nations.
- 1961

Failure of the Bay of Pigs Invasion of US-backed Cuban exiles against Cuba.
- 1980

Climax of Berber Spring in Algeria as hundreds of Berber political activists are arrested.

STRAIGHT LINE



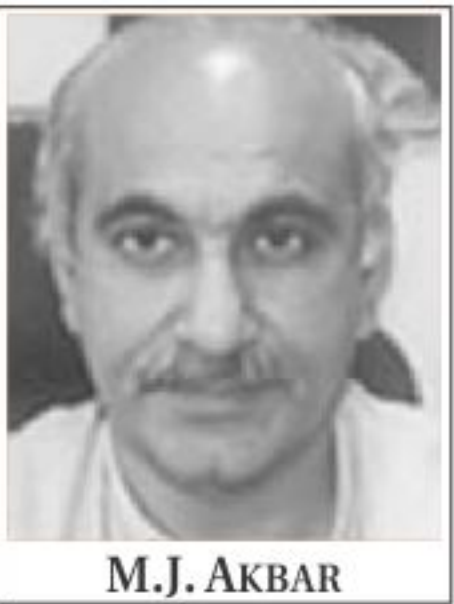
THE assault on lawmen, particularly the police, in the first quarter of 2013 has assumed a disturbing proportion. The death of eight policemen and injury of more than two hundred others are manifest demonstration of an ominous tactic of supposedly democratic protesters. Experts have doubted if such deaths and injuries have been caused by operational inadequacy of police and whether the government is seriously seized with the issue in its entirety.

There is no denying that Bangladesh is now witnessing politics of violence, which means resorting to physical violence to promote a political objective as well as the violence of politics, which denotes violence built into the institutionalised structure of politics. Liberal ideology denies the existence of violence of politics and tends to reduce all violence to the status of contingent violence, which is not a threat to the system.

In our context, one has to admit that the intensely confrontational politics that we see now has been significantly responsible for the opposition's strategy of targeting the police with a view to shattering public confidence in the principal law enforcement organ of the state. This is an unexpected development in the supposedly constitutional protest scenario. These are clear instances of terrorism and subversion as opposed to the usual political violence.

Under the circumstances, while one could take issue with the alleged deficiencies in the operational procedures of police, one has to remember that a predominantly civil force is not expected normally to operate in combat formation. If they do so not only would normal law and order functions be largely prejudiced, it would also in the process alienate the outfit from the general population whose

BYLINE



CHECK with the haunted: ghosts do not die. Since this sounds like the ultimate paradox, some explanation is necessary. Ghosts are not happy spirits. A ghost is spectre of justice denied, a moan from beyond the grave, revenge that has survived burial. A ghost does not leave judgement to God; it seeks its target while the assailant is still alive.

Many of those who instigated mobs in the anti-Sikhs riots of 1984 are dead; some have slipped, with age, into decrepitude. Legal justice has been tawdry, because the establishment has protected the guilty. But there are at least two VIPs who cannot shake off their ghosts despite 29 years of protection and promotion, offered by Congress, which has been in power for 21 of these years. Sajjan Kumar was an MP and would have remained one till now but for an accidental burst of anger by a Sikh journalist in 2009. Jagdish Tytler is a senior Congress leader, with a seat in its highest committee.

The ghost chasing Tytler is relentless. Each time Tytler becomes complacent, it pops up. Tytler has reason to be complacent. It took India's premier police unit, CBI, 23 long years to produce its final report for the courts; it concluded that there was no case against Tytler. The court was sceptical. Two years later, in 2009, CBI repeated its charade, despite the fact that the Nanavati Commission had held Tytler culpable. India, thankfully, is not a police state. A sessions court has again thrown Tytler back into the public limelight.

Tytler behaves likes a split personality when he appears on television to defend himself, half anxious, half smug. His central argument is equivocal: he does not challenge the

Assault on police

support and cooperation is continually required for its service delivery. In the presently charged atmosphere it might appear inappropriate to delve into the subject of norms of modern policing. However, it needs to be emphasised that the police force are a body of citizens in uniform exercising their lawful rights. At the same time the assumption is that the majority of the citizens would obey the majority of laws for the majority of the time. Our reality is vastly different and thus our police are charged with



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accomplishing an incredibly complicated task. The intensity of the attack on the police and the manner in which it is being carried out should convince us that the present situation cannot be approached as exclusively a law and order issue. Therefore, one needs to know who are misusing the loud-speakers in the mosques to incite gullible villagers against the police by projecting the latter as anti-Islam forces. One also needs to know why

such misdeeds are not politically countered in the affected area. This does not, however, preclude the inputs of critical intelligence that the agencies are supposed to provide in time. The political terrorist may be a separate category to be dealt with. However unpalatable, it is becoming clear that religious zealotry has been a major source of terror. Such terrorists are targeting police and citizens with the express political purpose of coercing others into actions they would not

otherwise undertake, or refrain from actions they desired to take. The security of the state shall always be important but what is more significant is to ascertain as to which actor is exceeding the limits of legitimacy and indulging in unacceptable levels of violence in the present situation. Is the state becoming both a provider and predator of security? Similarly, are dangerously inflamed and violent protesters deliberately taking on the state apparatus with

sinister schemers in the background stoking the fires?

The necessity of holding an executive enquiry, followed by judicial enquiry wherever applicable, into each incident of police firing live ammunitions should be followed. It would also be an imperative to ensure that the state agencies do not go beyond the purview of legal boundaries. At the same time the right of private defence of the body as enshrined in law should be seen to be applicable in equal measure for members of the law enforcement body.

The assault on police needs to be looked at in the background of the wider political canvas. While targeting lawmen could not be a mode of political protest, it needs to be seen whether a situation is, willy-nilly, emerging wherein violence becomes the sole alternative. If that be so, it would be extremely difficult to manage public safety by police actions. In the meantime the state should take actions that would substantially reduce human casualties on all sides.

Coming to specifics, we have to know if there are quarters that seek a political statement in acts of straightforward terror. We cannot countenance a situation where all the human rights are reserved for the practitioners of violence, while the government dealing with the menace is arraigned day and night on grounds of violation of human rights. What is needed is to delineate the parameters that harmonise the defence of political and democratic integrity with the respect for human rights.

When the protector is attacked the signal is one of governance deficit. While law enforcement managers will have to firmly and appropriately deal with the emerging menace those in the business of politics have to ensure that a public agency maintained by public exchequer is not thrust into an adversarial role vis-a-vis the members of public. Affairs of the state demand pragmatic attention.

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If you want to predict election results, an astrologer may still be of some use; but it is far more useful to look at unemployment figures, followed closely by an examination of corruption levels. Voters resent corruption because it is theft; what makes them apoplectic is that it is theft of their money, or the nation's

Ghosts do not die

cal: he does not challenge the Nanavati verdict, but adds with a shrug that it is hardly his fault if CBI did not find any evidence. The smirk is almost too much to bear. What Tytler, his guardians and acolytes do not quite understand is how much India has changed. There are many reasons obviously, but it can be said that one of the catalysts was the Gujarat riots. A cover-up is no longer possible. In 1984, Rajiv Gandhi read out a speech written by an over-smart bureaucrat justifying the violence with the metaphor that when the

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earth shakes, a banyan or two is bound to tremble. No one would suggest this today. The Gujarat riots have been followed by unprecedented media investigation, and judicial scrutiny supervised by the Supreme Court. VIP politicians are in jail. The process is exhausting and exhaustive, but it will separate the guilty from those who were not directly responsible.

No politician ever went to jail for riots before Gujarat; in fact, hardly anyone went to jail at all. Take a count of major incidents in the last five decades: Jamshedpur in 1964, Ranchi in 1967; Ahmedabad in 1969, when

shifted. Sudhakar Rao Naik was CM of Maharashtra during the three months of riots in Mumbai following Babri in 1992-93; the guilty named in the Srikrishna report have been left free. Narasimha Rao was PM then. It is a depressing list.

Public accountability, spurred by popular will, is principally responsible for the reduction in the scale and frequency of riots. Politicians may be worried about courts, but they are terrified by voters. The mood of the country has changed visibly. The young, who are in the forefront of this change, want to leave the past behind; for them governance is measured in



resources. A nation belongs to the voter, not to a government. Governments are only temporary custodians.

There is no truth about politics, which is totally true. But that which is largely true determines the fate of elections. Caste and creed have not disappeared, but pillars of the old life are fading as another new age begins to rise on the Indian landscape. And when they are finally buried, they will not beget any ghosts.

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