

International Day of Democracy

Are we doing our bit to see it thrive?

162 nations of the world, members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, observed the International Day of Democracy on September 15. In Bangladesh the celebrations are confined to the Jatiyo Sangsad, without the opposition, who choose to stay away, and, equally regrettably, without the people.

For us the day is of special significance. Democracy was subverted from time to time through dictatorial interventions. And having restored democracy from the clutches of an autocrat through a long 9-year struggle, the country had finally embarked on the road to democracy 22 years ago. Since then we have had four general elections that were participatory and, except for the losing party, accepted universally as being fair and free. But unfortunately, a good part of the term of all the four parliaments was marked by the opposition boycott of it.

Notwithstanding the ups and downs since democracy was resurrected in 1991, transfer of power had been peaceful except the last time when, regrettably, we stumbled, in 2006, because the country had to undergo a period of emergency till we had an elected government in 2009.

We hope that our leaders have not forgotten the consequences of the impasse brought upon by inflexible positions of both the parties in 2006. If democracy stumbled then it was because of the mistakes committed by our leaders. It seems the same blunders are being repeated. We hope that both parties will learn from the follies of 2006, which was not too long back, and avoid the consequences of the past.

Factory Survey

Cannot brook unnecessary delay

AFTER inordinate delay following the most serious factory disaster in the country, authorities have postponed inspection of factories which were supposed to start yesterday. The factory survey initiative involves the labour and employment ministry in collaboration with the ILO. The plan is to inspect 2,250 factories by 30 teams of experts led by Buet. However action plan or checklist for the survey is yet to be agreed upon by the stakeholders.

Three separate platforms Buet, IndustriALL and North American Alliance agreed to follow a common action plan and the global platforms were supposed to send a list of the factories they are to inspect. Sadly this has not happened.

It will be very unfortunate if this initiative queues up in the line of all the other important tasks to be accomplished which would ensure the safety of the factory workers including RMG workers. Bangladesh RMG sector continues to be a subject of discussion internationally, and national and international journalists and activists are working to keep the issue alive. But how long will these initiatives go on and will there be any concrete action from the government and international partners?

We cannot stress enough how important the factory surveys are, particularly for the RMG industry and for the nation. Any soft-pedaling on this matter may result in more accidents, deaths, scurrility and become further proof of incompetence. We hope that the survey starts without any further delay, and the grace period of 7-10 days are the last bit of postponing that happens in this process.

Pride over ravages of war

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

FOR Afghan people, the day after the SAFF football concluded will forever be etched in memory. No, their tale of sporting success won't be written in gold in the global annals of sporting glory, but in South Asia, they are now truly the lions in football.

To be forthright, the lions of Khorasan – the name of the Afghan team - have roared and went back home with the trophy. In a tournament with goals galore and emerging power houses other than India and Bangladesh, the war torn country has shown that despite exploding bombs and irreconcilable ethnic divides, sport can always work as a uniting factor – no matter how short lived that is.

A few months from now, the current glory of the team, comprised mainly of expat players, will become somewhat faded but the message they sent need to be taken seriously by other footballing nations of the region, especially Bangladesh, which saw the tournament end in sheer humiliation.

While we congratulate the team from a conflict ridden nation, some soul searching is necessary as to why, after spending such staggering amount of money for foreign coaches, we failed to provide any sparkle. It's believed that a probe report will be submitted but past instances have shown such inquests into debacles never inject any sense.

At this time of international ignominy in football, a comment made by a football federation official a few months ago, that Bangladesh will be aiming to play in the 2022 World Cup, comes into question. When we struggle in the regional meets, it's ludicrous to even contemplate playing at the highest level of the game. SAFF has proved one thing conclusively: we have been reduced to paper tigers!

Forget about becoming an Asian power house, securing South Asian supremacy is now a daunting task! Couple of years ago, when Argentina played Nigeria in a friendly in Dhaka, there was much talk about how this high-profile game would ramp up our game.

In reality, that match made a lot of money for the organisers but did little in improving our standard of the game. Bizarrely, sometime back there was talk again of bringing some top level international club team on the pretext of elevating our football. SAFF has made us sensible, and so, forget super stars, bring Asian teams first for regular friendlies and revive the once popular President Cup.

The writer is current affairs analyst for The Daily Star.

Felaini murder trial can be the beginning..

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

September 6.

It is no doubt a good piece of news for the bereaved family members of Felani. Her parents and relatives will naturally want to see justice done to their beloved child who became the victim of mindless act of shooting by a BSF member. Along with her parents and close relatives, near and dear ones of hundreds of other victims of BSF atrocities at the Bangladesh-India border will also wait with their fingers crossed to see that due process of law is finally started to bring to light what happened on the fateful day of January 7, 2011 at the Anantapur border point at Phulbari upazila in Kurigram. That is because the very recognition of the fact that what this hapless Bangladeshi girl was subjected to was unjust, inhuman and outrageous will also vindicate that other Bangladeshis who perished under similar circumstances at the Bangladesh-India border had also been victims of wanton killing.

The irony is that the credit, if any, for even considering that the case of Felani, only a single instance of a hundreds of other similar casualties of senseless brutality along the international border between Bangladesh and India, at least merits a compassionate look, goes not to the government of the country of which the victim was a citizen. On the contrary, it is the BSF, the alien organisation behind the killing of the Bangladeshi girl, has decided to take the matter seriously.

And what is commendable at this point about the case is that the issue of border killings is now being treated with some seriousness by either of the governments, an attitude that was lacking in the past.

Interestingly, after the GSFC's judgment was disclosed, foreign minister Dipu Moni admitted to the press that it (Felani's) was a tragic murder, adding that, her government had sought justice and would appeal against it if they did not get justice.

One would like to be reassured from our foreign minister's statement. We say this because it appears to be a change of heart on the government's part. For in the past, there were instances when government leaders would rather get annoyed if reports of any torture or killing of Bangladeshis by BSF members were brought to their notice. We may recall what LGRD minister Syed Ashraf's view was on the issue. "The state is not too much concerned about it. It is not right that the state shall focus only on these issues, leaving aside all other businesses," he told reporters on January 21, 2012 when they wanted to know from him if torture and killing of Bangladeshis at the border were provocative.

So we feel reassured that that the government's attitude towards border killings has after all changed.

Felani appears to be the luckiest of all the ignored and

THE Indian Border Security Force (BSF) has decided to revise the Felani Khatun murder trial, the Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh told the media on September 13. This decision has come a week after a special BSF court had cleared the lone accused, Constable Amiya Ghosh, of the charge brought against him. It is worthwhile to note that a General Security Force Court (GSFC) that held the trial against the BSF jawan for allegedly killing Felani Khatun pronounced him not guilty on



Through her death she has been able to vindicate the fact that what the BSF has been doing at the border in the name of containing trespassing of terrorists, smugglers and illegal immigrants into Indian territory is unjust, unfair and inhuman.

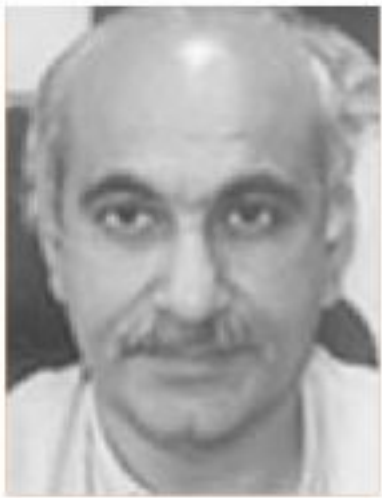
forgotten Bangladeshis so far killed in BSF firings at the border. Through her death she has been able to vindicate the fact that what the BSF has been doing at the border in the name of containing trespassing of terrorists, smugglers and illegal immigrants into Indian territory is unjust, unfair and inhuman. Even if those people had committed a wrong of trespassing, they deserved to be punished through a legal process and not through the indiscriminate use of gun at a border between two friendly countries and who are not at war with each other.

The revised trial of the Felani murder case should pave the way for looking into a large number of other killings of Bangladeshis at the border in a similar light. Aghast at the unabated murder of their fellow people at the Bangladesh-India border, we want the government to come out of its lackadaisical attitude on the issue and take a proactive rather than a reactive response to such bloody border incidents in the future. In a similar vein, it is also expected that the government would place a list of all the cases of border killing till date to the Indian authorities to seek justice for those victims. The ongoing Directors-General level BGB-BSF conference in Dhaka can well be used to start the process.

The writer is Editor, Science & Life, The Daily Star.
E-mail: sfalim.ds@gmail.com

The shifting stories of five years

BYLINE



M.J. AKBAR

ONE useful aspect of a grand old house in Europe or America was the weathervane. Stuck at the apex, it did not look very elegant, but its value was not measured by aesthetics. It gauged the direction of the wind in an age when nature had far more control over human affairs.

The British built the grand imperial cities of Kolkata, Madras, Mumbai, and, in the 20th century, New Delhi. But there were no weathervanes, possibly because nature is more predictable in India. When it rains it pours. When storms arrive, dark clouds swirl across the sky as advance battle formations. Delhi is not London, where you can perspire as you leave home, get caught in a chilly shower and return with a cold.

But what Delhi has lost in external sensors, it more than compensates through internal aeries. Human nature is the worry in Delhi, not nature. In that special patch of the capital which provides temporary housing to the various castes of the ruling class, every ear has a powerful antenna, constantly fine-tuned to pick up the waft and flow of that dramatic phenomenon called the political wind.

Delhi's layers of power brokers have not survived the rise and fall of empires without an acute sense of homage to those on the ascendant, even when the possible has not become probable, let alone factual. A historian would do well to record how conversation has changed over the last five years in India's august capital.

In 2009, Delhi could talk of nothing else but how Congress, and its presiding Gandhi family, would rule India for the next twenty years at the very least. It was up to Rahul Gandhi to decide when he wanted to become Prime Minister, a view echoed formally by Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh at a famous press conference that year. There was much admiration, in rotund phrases, for Rahul Gandhi's choice of a waiting room as his preferred abode. A mild unease about corruption by the winter of 2010 did not much change the narrative; Rahul Gandhi's team continued to be feted at dinners and wooed as high officials of the next durbur.

Then came Anna Hazare, with Baba Ramdev in tow. Heads wagged solemnly, but the wise had seen it all. This was one of those periodic blips that must inevitably inter-

So far he was surrounded only by supporters. Now he will be pursued by sycophants. That can be dangerous in a game where there continues to be many a slip between cup and lip.

rupt a majestic procession. It would disappear, said all the ministers deputed to swat the fly, as quickly as it had come. Had no one heard about public memory? It was short, short, short. The smiles remained wide.

Then came the shock of UP elections in 2012. The script said Congress would declare victory if it won 80 seats [a number picked up from expensive opinion polls], and this would become the arch through which Rahul Gandhi could walk towards the Prime Minister's chair. Defeat introduced the first shades of doubt.

Narendra Modi's re-election in Gujarat later that year began to change the scenario. Paradoxically, Modi aroused both apprehension and hope. His political skills and governance record were powerful assets; could Congress turn the Gujarat riots into a polarising negative? And so hundreds of opinion pieces and news stories flooded media suggesting that BJP would defeat itself if it chose Modi as its mascot.

The BJP, however, heard the voice of its cadre, which lived on the street rather than Delhi's warrens. Now that he is the party nominee for PM, to visible enthusiasm, Modi has one important thing left to worry about. So far he was surrounded only by supporters. Now he will be pursued by sycophants. That can be dangerous in a game where there continues to be many a slip between cup and lip.

Delhi is worried about Modi not because of his party, but because he is an outsider, shorn of the English-induced cultural or academic sophistications that Delhi's elites expect from anyone audacious enough to demand their services. Modi served tea to customers in his brother's teashop and his family remains linked to its roots. His English is unlikely to impress the Queen of England. But most of all, Delhi is anxious about his reputation for being tough. Delhi deals in compromise, not accountability, and no one really wants a bull ram-paging through the expensive china that elites have accumulated over so many decades.

Delhi has handled outsiders before, at different levels of power. But they have mostly done Delhi the favour of proving incompetent. Lal Bahadur Shastri was the one outsider who could have changed the dynamic of this city, but he did not live long enough, and may have been scarred by the Tashkent agreement with Pakistan by then. So Delhi will resist Modi with one face, the private one, and beam with its other, public face.

It is going to be fascinating face-off for the six months left before elections.

The writer is Editor of The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and Editorial Director, India Today and Headlines Today.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Syria controversy

This refers to the report, "Britain sent poison gas agents to Syria" (Sept.9). This report, which too was published in a reputed UK daily, enjoins the UK government to take action against these companies who are alleged to have supplied poison gas to Syria. The British government should not blindly support the Obama administration in carrying out 'invasion' against a sovereign nation. Only a UN mandate authorises such an action. The US should share the intelligence on poison gas. There are also reports that rebels also used poison gas apart from Syrian government forces. The US should not act like a global cop. Syria should not become another Iraq. Obama won the presidential elections on the premise of criticising the US military intervention in Iraq on the assumption of Iraq having weapons of mass destruction. Later on, the US government itself admitted that Iraq did not have such weapons. Who will punish US for war crimes? That is a million dollar question.

Deendayal M. Lulla
Mumbai, India

Chess deserves more space

Chess is the royal game of tactics and strategy. Unlike other games, both indoor and outdoor, this game has a fairly long history. But chess is not given enough space in your paper's sports section. Your sports pages tend to focus on football and cricket. Chess isn't also getting enough coverage in the local TV channels. In that way, the young generation will remain ignorant of this great game.

We hope that your daily will give more space to chess and thus help the game flourish in our country.

Zabed Wali
Chittagong

Why are they furious against Snowden?

It's really kind of amazing if you try and count the number of countries at whom US has directed its fury and threatened over the last two months in connection with the Snowden affair. They began with the government of Hong Kong, followed that up with the government of China, then moved to Latin America and threatened countries including Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua over whether he would be granted asylum.

Everyone in the world knows, probably except for Americans, that US routinely refuses to extradite all sorts of people accused of horrible crimes. We also stated that we are appalled by the incredible cynicism of practically all the countries in the world vis-à-vis what this young man has done, sacrificing his life and his future for something in which he believed. They are furious against it. Why are they furious? Because of something that this young man revealed.

Ted Rudow III, MA
Encina Ave
Palo Alto, CA

Comments on post editorial, "Why the worry over our elections?" published on September 13, 2013

Fazlul Bari

Does Mr. Mahfuz Anam not think that these foreign entities such as UN, EU, UK and US are meddling in the internal affairs of Bangladesh? Election is an internal matter of Bangladesh. Let the people of Bangladesh figure it out by themselves.

Rezaul Karim

Good points, Mr. Bari, but you forgot to mention Indian interventions in all our internal affairs. The current PM seems to only listen to Delhi and nobody else, even though they kill our people every day at the border with impunity.

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

We don't want to see any foreign power dictating us.

truthprevails53

EU is satisfied but the US wants an army base in Bangladesh to flex its muscle with Russia. The UN is a toothless agency easily influenced by the US.

SM

Russia? Where is the closest Russian establishment? US has India to tackle South Asia.

truthprevails53

Indo-Russian tie is far better than Indo-US one. Do your research properly. Russia is the biggest provider of weapons to India.

Salim Ullah

Whenever any political crisis emerges in our country, all foreign masters start poking their noses in our internal matter and equally, all political leaders seek sympathy and support of all embassy offices and ambassadors which is always disgraceful for any independent country.

Rezaul Karim

Again another thoughtful article by Mr. Anam. But will the regime pay any heed as they turned a blind eye to his earlier strong assertions? Mr. Anam, the current PM is not only stubborn, she is unreasonably stubborn.