

Bangladeshi detainees in Thailand

Urgent need for intervention

SOME 350 Bangladeshis are reportedly held in prison and detention centres under inhuman condition in Thailand for allegedly trespassing on that country's territory. The consular team from Bangladesh embassy that interviewed those people at the detention centres is of the view that most of them are Bangladesh nationals. It is presumed that those people had drifted into Thai waters while trying to enter Malaysia illegally by boat.

The first question that comes to mind: How did they land themselves in such a distressful situation? Needless to say, they were desperately in search of job abroad and there must have been a criminal syndicate of unscrupulous recruiting agents and human traffickers who took advantage of their desperation to lure them into this hellhole. While determining the identities of these hapless people, the government should take steps to ferret out the culprits behind their misfortune and bring them to justice. There is nothing wrong in our youths' yearning for getting jobs abroad to change their economic lot. But they should not take to misadventure in the process.

Had those victims of imprisonment and detention in Thailand been sufficiently aware and could distinguish between the criminal trafficking rackets and genuine recruiting agents it could have made a world of difference in their lives. The imperative is to develop this necessary awareness and the ability among them to choose the right agencies in their search for employment abroad. An effective government intervention is still awaited in this regard.

City's water woes

Ensure balanced use of ground and surface water

EVERY summer, Dhaka city faces an acute water scarcity. Polluted water carrying germs of water borne diseases make the crisis even worse.

The root of the crisis lies in imbalanced use of ground water vis-a-vis surface water. Reportedly, 85 per cent of the city's water demand is met by ground water sources. This excessive dependence on the ground water has caused its rapid depletion and put a severe strain on pumping out of water. Shortage of power and numerous illegal water connections only exacerbate the problem.

On the other hand, increased rate of urbanization, illegal occupation and encroachment have reduced the amount and volume of surface water bodies around the city. And existing sources like Buriganga and Sitalakhya rivers are so polluted that it needs high capacity water treatment plant to make the water usable which the WASA utterly lacks.

Thus, to ease the pressure on ground water, the government should facilitate utilisation of surface water. To do so, we have to opt for de-polluting existing surface water sources, reclaiming encroached sources and establishing adequate water treatment facilities.

The government should also take up innovative water management techniques like rain water harvesting, water recycling that have been widely practiced and recommended around the world.

Someone needs to light a candle

GROUND REALITIES



Syed Badrul Ahsan

ON a steamy morning, the minister of state for home would have us know that abductions have gone down in number in the country. The next day, seven men are kidnapped in Narayanganj and the law enforcers have little clue as to where they have been taken. A few days later, the bodies of the abducted men, bloated and gruesome, emerge from the Sitalakhya.

The minister of state then informs us that the machinery of the state is at work, that the prime minister has directed that the culprits behind the tragedy be caught and brought before the law. No one asks him why the prime minister must issue a directive before any action is taken on a happening, on any happening, that has a bearing on the lives of citizens.

A week passes by before the police raid the residence of the principal accused in the kidnap-murder case. They find no one there, at least not the man or men they are looking for. Should we be surprised? No one with a record of crime behind him and charged with a new crime will wait, like a proper gentleman, for the police to arrive and haul him away to prison.

One surprise leads to another. The minister of state casually informs a gathering that he can see the hands of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party behind the murder of the abducted men. Not even the prime minister is willing to disagree with that notion. That only makes the wound fester. But before that, the wife of the murdered Nazrul Islam, in an understandably emotional state of mind, charges her local Awami League lawmaker with complicity in her husband's murder.

Only days later, she appears at a rally, in the company of the lawmaker and her father, to let the nation know that it was Nur Hossain, the fugitive Awami Leaguer at whom the finger of guilt remains pointed, who murdered her husband. As for the lawmaker, he speaks of God and of His Prophet; he swears he will have the culprits apprehended and punished. He is not afraid of anyone, says he. The theatrics are impressive.

And then the father-in-law of the dead Nazrul Islam squarely blames the Rapid Action Battalion for the abduction and death of his son-in-law and all the others. The RAB chief says an accusation is no proof of crime actually committed. He is right, but will he get into action, into truly investigating the grave charge laid at the door of his agency?

A few days ago, a senior police official, comprehending the nature of public outrage in light of the Narayanganj tragedy, told the media that henceforth policemen would not be in plainclothes when they go into detaining people. Moreover, any citizen using tinted glass on his car would have to take it out in the interest of security. It is all so very interesting, but the police official does not say if the directive about tinted glass on vehicles applies to ministers and lawmakers. These days, as ministerial cars and lawmakers' vehicles shoot through the streets of this city, you do not

know who is inside. Must our elected representatives conceal their identities from us, we the people?

There are other images that leave us perturbed and then disturbed. Schoolchildren and their teachers must wait for hours under the sun on rural roads because a minister or a minister of state means to visit the place. That is against the law, against all norms of civility. And yet no one says or does anything about these bizarre twists of politics. Abroad, the nation's diplomatic missions are under the scanner. Rumours abound of bad doings at the High Commission in London, of money going missing, of unauthorized appointments being made. A junior diplomat under suspicion of wrongful dealing with an employee is quietly sent off to his new posting outside Britain. Another diplomat, confronted with a Deyyani Khobragade-like situation in New York, flies off to his new assignment before the law can catch up with him.

No move is made to ask for explanations or to summon the high commissioner or ambassador, as the case may be, home. Another diplomat, an ambassador in a European country, is taped employing vile language against the very government he is supposed to be representing abroad. Expatriate Bangladeshis write to the Foreign Office, to the Prime Minister's Office, to ask for action. Nothing happens.

The daughter of the nation's first prime minister writes a book on her father. She is swamped with all sorts of abuse on social media. Some newspapers, in motivated manner, pick out those portions from her work that will pit her against the government. They conveniently leave out everything else. History once again is in danger of being sliced down the middle.

The police cannot arrest criminals, have no clue at all about the many incidents of crimes committed across the country. But they certainly can come in the way of a peaceful protest, organized by eminent citizens, over abductions and killings in the country. Indigenous women are subjected to violence, indiscriminately and endlessly. No one on the higher perches of authority comes forth to call the guilty to account. The young Toki was murdered two years ago. His killers roam free.

A year ago, the rowdy elements of the Hefajat-e-Islam caused mayhem on the streets of the nation's capital, would not return home, until they were flushed out of the place. Cases were filed against them. And that was all. No investigation has been done, no one has been produced in court. The Hefajat chief now believes people among the ruling circles are his friends.

It is not a pretty picture. Does the prime minister know where things are going wrong, how they are going wrong? Why they are going wrong? Is the government alert to the thought that it might be getting undermined from within? Or do the powers that be rest in the belief that it will all blow away, as any Kalbaishakhi storm must blow away at some point?

In the gathering darkness, someone must light a candle of hope.

The writer is Executive Editor, *The Daily Star*.
E-mail: ahsan.syedbadrul@gmail.com

Asia's patriotic gore

THE ASIAN CONVERGENCE



Koichi Hamada

IF a space alien landed in East Asia today, it would find a region shaped by rapid economic transformation, complex geopolitical dynamics, and deep historical animosities. Perhaps viewing the region from such a perspective is exactly what Asia's leaders need to do to ensure that its positive trends continue – and to halt the dangerous ones.

Our alien guest would most likely land in East Asia's largest country, China, where three decades of phenomenal economic growth have lifted millions out of poverty and transformed Chinese society. Yet China retains its traditional Sino-centric worldview, which it seems keen to impose on its neighbors. Indeed, as China expands its military resources, it is taking increasingly bold steps to assert its dominance over sea-lanes in all directions – provoking both anxiety and ire among its regional neighbors.

In Japan, which China recently overtook as the world's second-largest economy, the visitor would find a country more interested in protecting its citizens' living standards and relatively stable political system than economic or political dominance. Nonetheless, Japan is eager to reestablish itself as a fully independent country, free of the guilt and obligations stemming from World War II. In a sense, it seeks to complete the diplomatic equivalent of what in the Japanese samurai tradition is called *genbuku* – a sort of coming-of-age ceremony, after which it would be considered a normal "adult" country.

Nearby South Korea, too, is working to transcend a painful past, which included being the battleground for both the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars. In Koreans' view, the tragedy that their country endured over the past two centuries merits their neighbors' acceptance of their view of history, especially concerning WWII.

The resulting rift between Japan and South Korea creates a problem for another key player in the region: the United States. Given America's diminished capacity to provide global leadership, it must rely more than ever on its allies to ensure that regional and global affairs hew to its ideals and interests – which include preserving the *Pax Americana* that has shaped East Asian affairs since WWII.

If the alien taking all of this in had some knowledge of game theory (at least a general understanding of its uses in assessing conflict), it would immediately comprehend that all of the relevant countries' objectives – whether territorial or related to historical narratives – cannot be fully satisfied simultaneously. But the challenge goes further: disputes over territory and history may well amount to a zero-sum situation or, worse, a prisoner's dilemma, in which mistrust and betrayal exact a heavy price from the parties involved.

Consider Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's controversial visit last December to the Yasukuni Shrine, which honors those who died in the service of Imperial Japan from the Meiji Restoration until 1951 – including 14 Class A war criminals from the Pacific War. Contrary to the prevailing interpretation, Abe's visit was not intended to celebrate the brutal aspects of Japan's history or justify its cause in WWII; Abe was driven by the sincere desire to honor those who sacrificed their lives for his country. He was genuinely practicing politics faithful to what Max Weber called the "ethics of conviction."

But the international community was not interested in that distinction. Condemnation of Abe's visit was to be expected from China and South Korea, which felt firsthand the devastation wrought by Japanese militarism. But

few anticipated that the US would adopt such a harsh tone in expressing its displeasure – a response that was likely driven by America's fear for the region's increasingly fragile peace (and perhaps, on some level, by the recollection of Japan as the enemy that attacked Pearl Harbor).

The US has a point. The fact is that, regardless of leaders' intentions, such disputes can undermine cooperation, creating a zero-sum situation. Abe may have to consider further Weber's "ethics of responsibility," which unlike the ethics of conviction, focuses on the consequences of an action, not the intention behind it.

In this sense, competing territorial claims – like those of Japan and China for the Senkaku (Diaoyu in Chinese) Islands in the East China Sea – pose a particularly intractable challenge, given the virtual impossibility of reaching a compromise. That is why the dispute is fueling rising tension between the two countries, undermining their ability to expand cooperation in ways that would benefit both.

For example, China's territorial claim is preventing it from accessing the jobs – and the associated knowledge and technology transfers – that deeper economic cooperation with Japan would offer. Similarly, Japan is missing the opportunity to provide China with tools to reduce air pollution, much of which blows toward the Japanese archipelago.

Consider US President Richard Nixon's opening to China in 1972, or Charles de Gaulle's resolution of France's war in Algeria. Perhaps only leaders like Abe, Chinese President Xi Jinping, and South Korean President Park Geun-hye – leaders whose patriotic credentials are unquestioned – can do what it takes to transform East Asia's zero-sum games into win-win policies.

It is up to politicians and diplomats to move countries from no-win impasses to the kind of mutually beneficial outcomes that are almost always found in trade and investment. Fortunately, though Abe has been criticized for embracing nationalism, he is in a position to play an instrumental role in deepening Japan's economic relationships with its neighbors.

In fact, it is something of an iron law of politics that only foreign-policy hawks and nationalists can deliver such outcomes: consider US President Richard Nixon's opening to China in 1972, or Charles de Gaulle's resolution of France's war in Algeria. Perhaps only leaders like Abe, Chinese President Xi Jinping, and South Korean President Park Geun-hye – leaders whose patriotic credentials are unquestioned – can do what it takes to transform East Asia's zero-sum games into win-win policies.

Of course, space aliens are unlikely to arrive in East Asia anytime soon. But one can easily imagine that they, like us, would prefer to land in a prosperous region in which countries pursue mutually beneficial cooperation, rather than in a zone of simmering conflicts where competing territorial and historical claims have thwarted the inhabitants' vast potential.

The writer is Special Economic Adviser to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, is Professor of Economics at Yale University and Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of Tokyo. This commentary reflects the author's personal views, not that of the Japanese government.

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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

PM should quit as home minister

To protect the life and property of the citizens is the main duty of any government. But today there is no security and guarantee of people's life and property in Bangladesh. People are being abducted everywhere. The number of abductions has increased after the Awami League government assumed state power. There is allegation that some state agencies are directly involved in many such incidents. Such allegations raised question whether the government really wants to protect citizens' life and property.

It has been reported that 53 people have been abducted within the last four months, many of whom have been killed. Recently, the abduction of seven people including a panel mayor in broad daylight from the court premises in Narayanganj and their subsequent killing really shocked the whole nation. No one is safe today. As a citizen of Bangladesh, my earnest request to the PM is that she should resign as the minister of home and hand over this responsibility to any other eligible person who can tackle the situation.

Liton Roy

Development worker
CNRS-Maxwell Stamp Limited Associations
Barisal

Will we ever get fair share of water?

Though once ours was called a riverine country, day by day most of our rivers are losing their natural flow, and some of them are even dead. Our agricultural production has been hampered massively as natural irrigation from river water has become almost impossible. We have to now totally depend on artificial irrigation. Except in the rainy season, the northern region often faces drought situation. The government's indifference and India's control over our shared rivers are the main reasons behind this horrible situation. We need to take the issue to the international court for establishing our rights to water of common rivers.

S. M. Imranul Islam Rajon

Executive Officer
Janata Bank Limited

Meet Urdu-speaking Bangladeshis' needs in budget

Recently, the Finance Minister AMA Muhith said at a budget meeting of National Economic Council that over 50 per cent of the forthcoming national budget would be implemented at district level to strengthen the local government.

The government's policy to address the needs of the people at district level through the local governments is very encouraging. We also hope that the budget allocation will be made in accordance with the government's policy to alleviate the miseries and sufferings of all the poor people particularly the slum dwellers and the Urdu-speaking Bangladeshis, who have been languishing in 116 camps in 12 districts since long.

Ahmed Ilias

Executive Director
Al-Falah Bangladesh

Comments on news report, "BNP might have links with it," published on May 3, 2014

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

AL's all home ministers in last 6 years blamed BNP whenever any crime occurred. Why are you guys reluctant to nab BNP leaders if you have any evidence of their involvement? At the same time, why are you so silent about your party men whose name came up?

Abbasuddin

Why are you sitting idle instead of arresting the BNP leaders if they are involved in this?

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

How typical! The minister is trying to hide his own failures by blaming others without any proof. So unfortunate that people like them have become cabinet ministers.

"Ershad wanted to grab power after Zia killing" (May 3, 2014)

Molla A. Latif

May be there are people who know who actually ordered Zia killing. The officers who were sentenced to death and killed and the officers who were the chairman and members of the Court Martial might have known it well. Why not they discharge their moral duty now? If Ershad did it, he should admit it now and face trial. He has nothing more to gain surviving in this mortal world with this stigma.

MH Khan

But where is the solid evidence that Ershad ordered the assassination of Zia?

An instrument of surrender

SHAHRIAR FEROZE

On this day in 1945 General Alfred Jodl, on behalf of the German High Command signed the unconditional surrender of all German forces in east and west of Europe. The signing ceremony took place at the French city of Reims at 2:41 on the morning of 7 May 1945.

This instrument of surrender signed by the Nazis is perhaps the most important capitulation document among all instruments of surrender in the history of warfare. We present the English text for our readers on the 69th anniversary of one of the most memorable event of the 20th century. The English text, is also considered to be the most dependable by all quarters.

The instrument was signed in the presence of the Supreme Commander of Allied Expeditionary Force, a representative from the soviet high command and a Major General of the French Army.

ACT OF MILITARY SURRENDER

1. We the undersigned, acting by authority of the German High Command, hereby surrender unconditionally to the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force and simultaneously to the Soviet High Command all forces on land, sea, and in the air who are at this date under German control.

2. The German High Command will at once issue orders to all German military, naval and air authorities and to all forces under German control to cease active operations at 2301 hours Central European time on 8 May and to remain in the positions occupied at that time. No ship, vessel, or aircraft is to be scuttled, or any damage done to their hull, machinery or equipment.

3. The German High Command will at once issue to the appropriate commanders, and ensure the carrying out of any further orders issued by the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force and by the Soviet High Command.

4. This act of military surrender is without prejudice to, and will be superseded by any general instrument of surrender imposed by, or on behalf of the United Nations and applicable to GERMANY and the German armed forces as a whole.

5. In the event of the German High Command or any of the forces under their control failing to act in accordance with this Act of Surrender, the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force and the Soviet High Command will take such punitive or other action as they deem appropriate.

Signed at Rheims at 0241 France on the 7th day of May, 1945.

69 years on but in the light of mounting tensions in East Europe did the instrument of surrender - meant for restoring peace in Europe - live up to its expectation?

 The writer is Current Affairs Analyst, *The Daily Star*.