

Death knell for the Turag

Take action now

THE wholesale grabbing and filling up of large portions of the 38km long Turag River have reached a stage when it can hardly be called a river anymore. Investigative journalism has revealed that the once ebullient river has turned into a stream at many points where large-scale landfills have permanently altered the course of Turag. That authorities' carefree attitude towards land grabbers is the primary reason for such a disaster is not in contestation. Indeed, none of the government bodies, including BIWTA, Rajuk, Department of Environment and the police, who have any authority to stand up to such illegal activity have lifted much of a finger to put a stop to these encroachers over the years.

With such loose monitoring, it is not at all surprising to find vested interests of all shades and hues ranging from industries to real estate agents making merry in marking off chunks of the river, bringing dredgers and carving out new areas for development. The so-called anti-encroachment drives launched by authorities every now and then hardly have any impact on such activity. The strangling of a river like Turag has far-reaching environmental consequences for a city like Dhaka. It affects the flood flow zone in the Detailed Area Plan of the city. And while different departments whine about not having enough personnel to do their job and with the lack of coordination between various agencies, the future of the capital city is being put grave to risk. Can we truly afford to go on ignoring an ecological disaster in the making?

Netanyahu's killing mission

Israel setting dangerous precedent

THE deaths of more than a hundred people in Gaza from Israeli air strikes have not moved Benjamin Netanyahu. The Israeli prime minister has vowed to continue what he calls action against Hamas terrorists. It is an attitude typical of Netanyahu, who has failed to respond positively to US President Barack Obama's offer of facilitating a cessation of hostilities. There is little reason to think that Israel's leader, whose understanding of the Palestine issue remains caught in a time warp, will be willing to listen to persuasion.

And yet ways must be found to stop Netanyahu. He simply has not cared that what he calls an operation to destroy Hamas is actually leading to the deaths of innocent Palestinians and the destruction of homes that could not have been centres of terrorism.

For the Israelis, this is no way of handling a conflict. Recent history shows that Israeli raids on Palestinian extremist groups, be they targeted assassinations or air strikes on suspected terrorist targets, have only resulted in a widening of armed Palestinian resistance to such Israeli insolence as the setting up of illegal Jewish settlements on Arab land and limiting Palestinians' access to free movement. The Netanyahu government is setting a terribly dangerous precedent. Its increasing propensity toward exercising terrorism on its own will swiftly create conditions where moderates in the Palestinian camp will be neutralized by radicals. That can only lead to an Israel surviving on a fortress mentality.

Low-key overture

Editorial: The Statesman

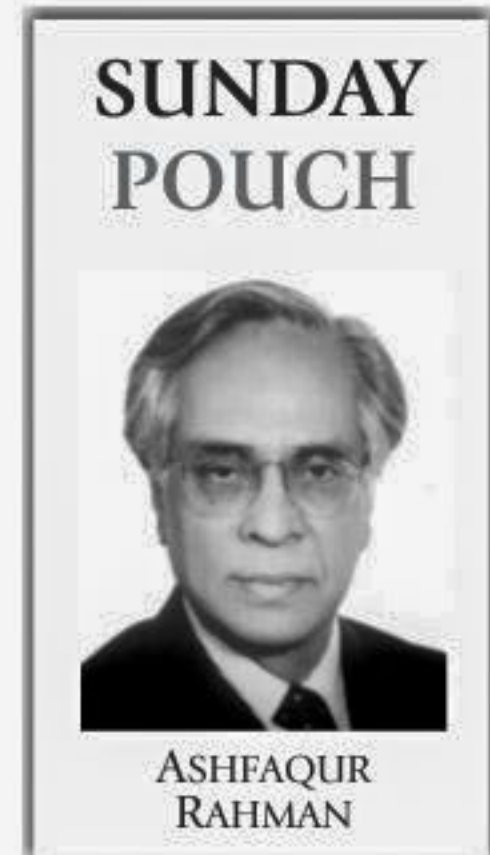
ACTUALLY unconventional, to an almost intriguing degree, was Mr. Narendra Modi's first prime ministerial visit to two of the three regions of Jammu and Kashmir. There were no high-profile meetings with the fractured "local" leadership, no talk of settling the vexatious "larger issue," no promises -- not even those which might have been expected with Assembly elections due a few months ahead. Yet it would be inaccurate and over-simplistic to write off the trip as non-political. There was subtle reiteration of his "development agenda," manifest not just in the opening of a rail link and hydel power unit.

More than subtle, crafty perhaps, for he ignored the "mainstream" and "separatist" political elements and indicated he would endeavour to go above their heads in reaching out to the people, youth in particular. The strategy being to use development as the means to take over the space that 'traditional' entities have long occupied -- sending out a message that it is the common man who has ever been left out in the cold. Mr. Modi raised no hopes, hence charges of broken promises cannot be levelled. And he steered clear of both the AFSPA and abrogating Article 370 controversies.

There was no belligerence when he expressed gratitude to the troops heavily deployed there: his stress that security was critical to development could have been intended to enlighten the folk -- in the Valley in particular -- that they were the real beneficiaries of the military mission to rid the state of jihadi terrorism and keep the border inviolate. That the National Conference, People's Democratic Party and the multi-faction Hurriyat had little to say actually "spoke" a lot. Were they getting caught up in their own knots, would the Modi-line unravel their self-serving intentions?

With the political situation in J&K fluid and no indications of pre-poll alignments the prime minister did not get bogged down in election-related posturing. Yet he did expose Omar Abdullah as immature and confused, the approach of the chief minister being influenced by diminishing prospects of re-election. It is ridiculous that Omar, and to an extent his immediate rivals, assert that Kashmir cannot be "bought," yet lament that New Delhi did not provide the funds the state required.

A case of beggars wanting to be choosers? Omar's bid to empathise with the trading community in Jammu who fear the impact of the Udhampur-Katra rail link was a brazen attempt to find favour in the traditionally BJP-backing region. Obviously, Mr. Modi's attempt to re-nuance the Kashmir conundrum will not produce immediate results: the point at issue is whether it will force the NC-PDP-APHC, and the Congress too, abandon the old "cards" and play new "tricks"?



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

it was given. The big question is, what have we gained through this award?

To start with, the award has given us access to the high sea beyond the 40 km boundary from the coast. The Bay up to 370 km from our coastal base line is our economic zone where we have sovereign rights. If our continental shelf stretches beyond this limit we may not have fishing rights but we have the right to exploit minerals and other resources on the sea bed. With one stroke we have been able to acquire three times the size of the existing ownership of the Bay.

We have now the sovereign right to fish, mine, collect and gather any resource available within the 19,000 sq km sea. Even sea birds flying over this territory are ours. Shipwrecks are ours too, to recover and claim. Any archaeology site found in this area is ours. Sure this is a massive deal, yet it is as much as we expected. As our foreign minister said, "the court's ruling was a victory for both countries." We claimed what we were entitled to under our specific circumstances because of the concave nature of our coastline. This position was upheld in the final ruling. The principle of equity was considered besides the principle of equidistance in determining the final sea boundary. We should, therefore, under the circumstances, remain satisfied.

It is necessary to see what specific resources we now have in this big water body. Let us first look at our fish resources. The Bay of Bengal is the home of myriad species of fish. From shrimp to tuna these fishes are available in large numbers and can be caught. We also have some endangered species. Therefore, our attempt should be to see that we do not do any unscientific harvesting of fish, thereby destroying these endangered species. The Bay is a biologically diversified basin and we should try to maintain this ecological diversity. We should try to catch fish with the help of most modern trawlers which are able to release endangered species if they are caught by mistake. Our attempt should be to catch the fish below 200 meters depth. We must leave fishes to be caught within 40 meter depth to wooden trawlers which are equipped with special nets so that fish eggs are not destroyed and this resource is not depleted.

FARHANA SYEAD

THIS year marks the 24th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMW). Though a long time has passed, only 47 states have ratified the Convention as of 2014. Around 200 million people in the world live in foreign countries as migrant workers. Because they are outside the legal protection of their home countries, migrants are often particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

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In recognition of this, the United Nations drafted and adopted the ICMW on December 18, 1990. It emphasises the connection between migration and human rights, which has increasingly become a crucial policy topic worldwide. It is believed that its existence sets a moral standard, and serves as a guide and stimulus for the promotion of migrant rights in each country. This international initiative helps us perceive that the instrument has been successful in ensuring the rights of migrant workers around the world. But the sharp rise in deaths of Bangladeshi labour migrants due to maltreatment and hazardous working conditions in recent years compel us to rethink about the effectiveness of the Migrant Workers' Convention in promoting their rights.

It is argued that ratification of ICMW is obstructed by politics and by lack of political will. ICMW has not received support or ratification from major labour receiving countries, including European countries. So far, countries that have ratified the Convention are primarily countries of origin of migrants (such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Morocco and the Philippines). For these countries, the Convention is an important instrument to protect their citizens living abroad. No migrant-receiving state in Western Europe or North America has ratified the Convention.

Other important receiving countries, such as Australia, Middle-Eastern states, India and South Africa have not ratified the Convention. As a result, the international community has failed to make migrants' rights a reality. Take the example of violation of migrants' rights in the Middle East. A recent survey suggests that more than half of Bangladeshi migrants face harassment while working abroad. These include wage problems, police pestering, and unacceptable treatment by employers on passport or visa related issues, and many other problems. For example, in Qatar, the much-criticised kafala system ties workers to their employers, meaning that employees are not paid and work in conditions of forced labour. The Qatari

Our wonderful Bay

NOW that the UN Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague has awarded Bangladesh more than 19,000 sq km of the disputed 25,000 sq km plus of sea in the Bay of Bengal, it is pointless to raise issues that cannot be resolved. The award as we all know is final and there is no appeal on it in any other legal forum in the world. We have to live with it peacefully and permanently. India too has officially accepted the award in the spirit

We have now the sovereign right to fish, mine, collect and gather any resource available within the 19,000 sq km sea. Even sea birds flying over this territory are ours. Shipwrecks are ours too, to recover and claim.

Two important resources in the Bay are oil and natural gas. These carbon content are deposited in the sediments on the sea bed brought down by the three river systems -- the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna -- over thousands of years. It is said that as the Bay is rich in this it needs scientific exploration. Most of the sediments have accumulated on the bed of the sea in the form of huge submarine fans. The richer hydrocarbon deposits are in the deeper part of the Bay which we have now acquired ownership of. Added to oil and gas these fans also contain gems and other minerals. Keeping all this in mind we need to first undertake a scientific survey of these sediments before we call for international companies to bid for their exploitation. A critical need, therefore, is to acquire a modern survey ship to do the job. We understand that such a ship is being procured with a loan from the Islamic Development Bank. Other specialised survey ships also must be procured to supplement the work of the mother ship.

The Bay of Bengal has been used as a trade route for centuries by various nations of the world. The Greeks, in their sailing manual the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, as early as the 1st century A.D., wrote that the route to India from

the Red Sea was along the Arabian Sea, and along the Bay of Bengal to eastern India. In the 2nd century Ptolemy referred to the voyages from Ganges across the Bay of Bengal to the Strait of Malacca for trade and development. So the Bay has been an important crossing point for international trade from time immemorial. Today, the Bay still

continues to be an important route in trade between South Asia and the South East Asian countries. We must ensure that this important route flourishes further.

The resources and the facilities that we now own need to be protected from predators. The entire nation needs to be like sentinels. But it will essentially be the task of our Navy to protect the resources. It has to ensure that a strict law and order regime is in place in our portion of the Bay so that no one dares to breach our maritime law. For this, our government has to invest in training, equipment and scientific skills.

An important need of the hour is to have a single authority like an independent commission on the Bay to devise policies for managing, exploiting and protecting the resources of our portion of the deep sea. It will be the national stock taker of these resources, central data storage, as well as a policy purveyor. New laws need to be enacted and the old maritime laws updated to protect our marine resources.

With all these resources in the sea coming to Bangladesh we must now stop cribbing about what sunken island we lost in the bargain or how many sq km of sea we were shortchanged. Let us work together to protect what we have got and how attractive and profitable we can make the sea for the benefit of our people.

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Protecting migrant workers' rights: Rhetoric vs. reality



government's figure on the numbers of migrants points out that 964 migrant workers from Nepal, India and Bangladesh died in Qatar in 2012 and 2013. A report by the international law firm DLA Piper reveals that, in all, 246 died from "sudden cardiac deaths" in 2012, 35 died in falls and 28 committed suicide.

The provisions of the ICMW clarify that basic economic, social, and cultural rights apply to both regular and irregular migrant workers. It also provides a framework of state responsibility and accountability as to how to deal with and treat illegal migrants. However, the ICMW permits states to limit the rights of certain specific categories of temporary migrants, such as seasonal workers, project-tied workers, or specified-employment workers. In particular, feminisation of the migrant labour force and states' increasing reliance on temporary workers are not adequately reflected in the ICMW.

Unskilled workers often use private recruitment agents who compete intensely for the sale of their labour to employers in the destination country. Moreover, temporary migrant workers are vulnerable to abuse in the recruitment process. Such abuse includes deliberate misinformation about the working and living conditions in the country of employment, and the charging of excessive fees. Besides, the chronic reluctance of states to agree to legally binding, multilateral instruments that regulate international labour migration and protect the rights of migrant workers is a major obstacle in turning migrants' rights from paper to reality.

It is pertinent to say that the aforementioned issues, along with the fear of sending countries that ratification would result in a loss of labour markets in destination countries to their non-ratifying competitors, as well as ignorance of ratified countries to properly address the concerns of their migrant workers show that there is mismatch between rhetoric and reality. Migrant workers, the national heroes of developing countries, want to enjoy their rights and have a peaceful, prosperous and secure life. For that, universal ratification of the Migrant Workers' Convention and political will of both labour sending and receiving states is of utmost importance.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Moral training for cricketers

The BCB has banned Shakib from playing. The problem lies in the fact that BCB does not know how to handle Shakib. On the other hand, Shakib too does not know how to handle stardom and money simultaneously. It is primarily because his education and knowledge is not commensurate with his fame and money.

It was the responsibility of BCB to recognise this problem and work hard enough to solve it. But unfortunately, Shakib never had a good mentor who could handle him properly. The question is whose responsibility was it to correct and groom him? Have we not seen participants in the reality shows? Did the participants look and appear the same in their first and last appearances on the screen? NO. They change so much. In these programmes each and every participant has to go through a series of lessons.

Most of our cricketers are from outside Dhaka with middle class or lower middle class economic background. Many of them did not even pass the HSC exam. I would expect BCB to arrange a series of grooming programmes every year to teach them spoken English, psychology, simple math and physics, laws and rules, morality and other human virtues. Lastly, the whole thing could have been handled in a far better way than they have done it.

Dr. Kamrul Hassan
Professor
Department of Physics
Dhaka University

Villages sans proper health service

Most of our people lack proper healthcare service as they live in villages. Recently, on the occasion of Awami League's 65th founding anniversary, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said, "Bangladesh made all its achievements under the AL leadership. And today Bangladesh has become a role model of development in the world."

How can it be possible for Bangladesh to become a role model of development when its village people don't even get basic healthcare service?

Arif Mujumder
Baridhara, Dhaka

World looks on as Israel kills Palestinians

So the media has really turned against Israel. Israel is getting a bad press; it's really getting a horrible press. World opinion is against the way they're so horribly treating the poor Palestinians.

They don't give a damn what the people are saying or what the U.S. President's saying or what the world is saying. They're going to go ahead and kill all the Palestinians. People are killed every day, hundreds are being wounded, and the Israelis are blockading the towns in the West Bank and Gaza even more. There is no end in sight, and ask prayers for Palestinians.

Ted Rudow III, MA
Palo Alto, CA, USA

Comments on news report, "Bangladesh gets 19,467sq km area in Bay," published on July 8, 2014

Zman7

It is yet another win in the legal battle to delimit the maritime boundaries between the two friendly neighbouring countries. Congratulations to the government of Bangladesh on its taking initiatives and the right decision at the right time to resolve the dispute in the international court.

Salahuddin Ayubi

We just got what is rightfully ours. I believe that justice has been done. Now we must make the best use of the new territory at sea which could not be explored because of Indian objection.

Touchstone

Great news, though some of us are so stingy that we grudge giving this government an inch of credit.

Hafeejul Alam

It's really breaking news for Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government should utilise this vast bay area adjacent to Myanmar and India for economic development of the country by expediting oil and gas exploration, maritime survey and research, collecting valuable underwater edibles including fish etc.

Iqbal

Congrats to our beloved country!

Ahmed

We got our due portion, not more; rather we got less than our demand. We lost Talpotti, why?

Monju Huq

What can be better news for us than this? Congratulations to the PM and her whole team on earning huge resource for our beloved country. Thank you all.

SM

BD will win in international courts if the government go to UN bodies for our share of rivers.