

State terror unleashed on Gaza

Will the powerful act to stop the carnage?

THE death toll is now over 400 following Israel's decision to increase its military offensive on the Hamas in the Gaza strip. The Israeli military is now engaging in ground assaults to add to their air-strikes in their bid to curb the Hamas. We condemn this abject display of violence and implore world leaders to stop diplomatic procrastination and pressure both sides to engage in peace talks. Treaty dialogue is imperative at the moment as UN reports have stated that more children have been killed in the conflict than militants. It is a sorry state of affairs and one that Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu has failed to take into account as he continues the all-out attack, ignoring the cries of protest emanating from the rest of the world.

Arrayed against Israel's armed-to-the-teeth military power, Hamas's rocket attacks are scratchy. Israel's amplified retaliation to force a military solution is causing the blood of innocent Palestinians to be shed on an unprecedented scale-leading to a human rights disaster. But the stand-off between the Israelis and the Palestinians in the Gaza strip is several decades old and one must ask how long both parties can continue in this vein before it completely strips away all human values. The United States, a long term ally of Israel, must now consider the rationale of the protests regarding Israel's actions and shift its stance. It is now up to the international community to pressurize the Tel Aviv government with appropriate tools in order to facilitate a dialogue.

Robber gangs at Sundarbans

Govt. must protect livelihood options

A large number of people depending on the Sundarbans for their livelihood are being preyed on by bandits on a regular basis for all sorts extortions. Their tyrannical strangle-hold in the area, thanks to pathological lack of control by the local administration, particularly the forest department, keeps impoverishing the people and denying the government of revenues.

The honey collectors, fishermen, crab catchers and golpata traders have to collect "forest permits" from the gangs' agents to be able to operate their business. The so-called 'decoit expenses' is not even 'protection money' demanded by mafia, as there is no guarantee for security to those who had paid the thugs in the Sunderbans. What's worse, new bahinis have sprung up so that a trader may end up paying at more than one point. Refusal to pay may lead to abduction and demand for ransom money.

In the overall context of criminality and illicit business of all kinds, loggers and poachers, have to pay tolls to the bandits as well. Weak vigil and law enforcement interspersed with collusive corruption have virtually meant abdication of authority by the people in charge.

We suggest that the local administration including the police, forest department and coast guards will have to put their heads together for capacity building and coordination at the operational level to stave off organized crimes in

EDITORIAL: THE STATESMAN (INDIA) The saffronite hand again?

EH CARR'S famous query -- what is history? -- remains unanswered in the midst of the Government of India's renewed meddling with the historian's craft. Quite simply, Clio deserves better from the political class. The state interference with historiography, markedly manifest ever since the Babri Masjid came under the pickaxe on December 6, 1992, is palpable once more. The appointment of Y.S. Rao as Chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research has been greeted with consternation in the academic circuit. On closer reflection, however, it need not have prompted almost a collective raising of the eyebrows by the secular fundamentalists. For the past two decades, the ICHR has been dominated as much by the saffronites as the Left's fellow-travellers, depending on the Delhi roulette and the party in power. For if the trend of the government-historian interface since the Nineties is any indication, the head of the ICHR has been a quasi-political appointment, with erudition and political predilection being accorded equal importance. Ditto, one must add, with its composition. Truth to tell, both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have been equally culpable in the detoxification of history. Changes in texts and the syllabus, if effected by one dispensation, are almost invariably negated by the other. More than a mandir or a masjid, it is the discordant cacophony of facts and interpretation that has befuddled both the historian and the student ... when not the courts. Whether or not ICHR deserves to be disbanded, as argued by a section of academics, need not detain us here. But considering that it selects the research projects that are eligible for state funding, it is fervently to be hoped that the born-again BJP government's edition of the ICHR will abjure what has on occasion been referred to as "manufactured history." History must of necessity be embedded in empirical evidence, and there can be no scope for playing around on this score ... determinant on the prejudices and preferences of the party in power. Yet, as with all social science disciplines, an event or a process is open to subjective interpretation. Truth to tell, history isn't a matter for the courts to decide.

Particularly distressing last week was the outcry in Parliament over the alleged "destruction of historical files," pre-eminently on the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, and the contributions of Lal Bahadur Shastri, Rajendra Prasad, and Lord Mountbatten. There was no indication in Rajnath Singh's feeble reply to vociferous Left and Congress MPs that the government has any inclination to institute an inquiry, most importantly the suspicion that "there is an RSS angle" to the reported "destruction." Is the history of the freedom struggle set to be binned, if selectively? The answer needs to be more substantial than the home minister's cursory response.

What would Bangladesh want to erase?

RUBANA HUQ

“WE regret to inform you that we are no longer able to show you the following pages from your website in response to certain searches on European versions of Google,” says Google. In May, a European Union's top court ruled that individuals have a “right to be forgotten.” Right after that order Google has been receiving 1,000 requests per day for the removal of search result links. So far Google has received 70,000 erasure requests for over 250,000 web pages. ‘Forget.me,’ (https://forget.me/), the site that manages reputational damage by offering to wipe clean any painful, harmful, irrelevant or excessive information, has reported to have 17,000 registered users who have submitted over 2,500 applications to Google.

If this nation of ours had a voice, would it have been able to appeal to the site Forget.me and write mails to Google and other search engines, and could it have been able to request for erasure as well? What are the recent episodes it would have wanted to be forgotten? What shames the soil and what would Bangladesh have preferred to be erased?

If Bangladesh could speak, it would probably appeal to erase the recent spate of alleged extrajudicial killings by security forces, the deaths after arrest occurring during “crossfire,” and the shoot-outs that appear to be killing people already in detention. With more than 150 people dying in pre-poll violence and with the frightening pattern of killings, with the number of extrajudicial killing standing at 2,216 between 2001 and 2013, with crossfire at 1,495 and with the number of deaths by torture at 299 during the same period, wouldn't our nation have rested better without this record?

If Bangladesh could speak, it would probably appeal for erasure of the Narayanganj seven murders, including Narayanganj city panel mayor Nazrul Islam and senior lawyer Chandan Kumar Sarker. It would possibly also wish to wash away the names of Lt. Col. Tarek Sayeed Mahmud, ex-Major Arif Hossain and Nur Hossain forever. The abduction and the seven bodies floating on the river are not what make Bangladesh proud.

If Bangladesh could speak, it would probably appeal for the expunction of the moment in history when World Bank cancelled its contract with the Government of Bangladesh for \$1.2 billion credit for the Padma Bridge in 2012 on account of having sensed corruption.

What else would Bangladesh possibly want to forget? April 24, 2013, would be a prime day of choice. Deletion of what happened that day is what this nation of ours would want the most. Rana Plaza, the nightmare, took 1,128 lives and placed Bangladesh on the

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global map of shame. Along with Rana, Bangladesh would probably also wish for the expunction of the record of the trade-unionist Aminul Islam's torture-ridden dead body being discovered from a road near Ghatail, and it would perhaps also appeal for the journalists Sagar-Runi murders to disappear from the search engines forever.

If Bangladesh could speak, it would probably wish for May 15, 2014 to be obliterated from the records forever. That was a day when MV Miraj-4 began its journey towards Shariatpur from Dhaka with more than 200 passengers on board and capsized and sank during a storm in Meghna near Gajaria, Munshiganj. At least 50 passengers died and many were missing in that tragic accident. But this isn't new at all. In retrospect, the state would perhaps request for cancellation of all the data of all the 4,420 people's death and 550 launch accidents over the last 38 years.

If Bangladesh had a voice, it would probably put its hands together and pray for oblivion of the incident in the search engines on the rape of Gita Rani, the 18-year old student of 12th grade from the Hindu Community on February 26, 2013 in Baintola village? Will this country ever be able to reconcile with this rape? How

can this country ever come to terms with January 3, 2013, the day of the murder of the 28-year old Sheuly Begum from the little village of Anarpura...just because of dowry?

And shall we also forget Felani, the minor girl who was shot dead on her way back home in Kurigram

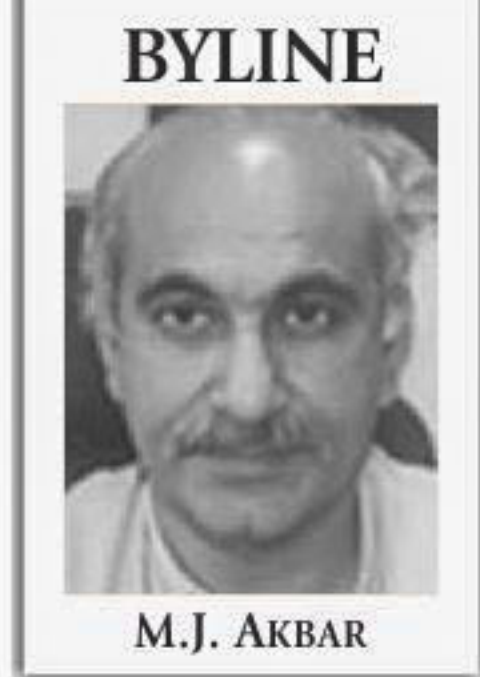
with her father and whose body was dangling on the barbed-wire fence for hours at a stretch, whose killer was prosecuted but was pronounced not guilty? Shall we also request to forget the 3,800-kilometre fences that host murder every time Bangladeshi cattle thieves are caught in the Indian town of Khowai bordering Habiganj, and every time young men from Choto Vetkhali, a river village of 1,500 people sitting less than three kilometres from the Indian border, are captured and shot dead when they try and cross over?

If this nation had vocal chords, it would also have begged for a total cancellation of the records of fundamentalism from all the search engines attached to all the queries relating to this soil.

The wish list could stretch to Forever. Bangladesh could appeal to Google for erasure of many more incidents, issues, practice and people. But unfortunately just oblivion doesn't help. Truth is that this country looks in the mirror every morning and responds to the global perceptions of its identity, which apparently seemed to be steeped in vulnerability and weakness. While a digital oblivion may help, our past is beyond erasure. And that is what's wrong with history.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

Fantasy-peddling is not diplomacy



BYLINE

M.J. AKBAR

SAINTS are the exception. Anyone else in the writing business, including those of us at the nether end of the business, can rarely resist the temptations of glory. The danger is obvious: vainglory, that purgatory space where imagination outstrips the boundaries of reality and ego functions on the basis of what we imagine we should be rather than what we are.

One reveals no secrets when recording that an itinerant Delhi columnist Ved Prakash Vaidik, who enjoyed his fifteen minutes of fame last week after a visit to Pakistan, has declared freedom from the desultory limits of nationalism and repositioned himself as an internationalist in the intellectual category of Rousseau and Karl Marx, the former a philosopher of the French Revolution and the latter an author of the Communist Manifesto. That is how Vaidik describes himself on his Twitter account, and who are we to argue? In his ranging role of a world citizen, Vaidik has been advocate of a solution to the vexed problem of Kashmir: a united and independent state.

This, understandably, makes Vaidik Pakistan's ideal Indian. The reception he received during his last trip to Islamabad and Lahore included a chat with our next-door Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and a very hearty meal with one of the world's most despicable terrorist ringleaders, Hafiz Saeed, who organised the assault on Mumbai in 2008 and continues to live like a lord in Lahore. This information is not confidential either. Vaidik has been talking about it to anyone who has the time to listen ever since he returned to Delhi.

When journalists try and make news rather than break it, they generally offer a butterfly story: it flits around a bit and then dies a quick death, killed by a yawn or a shrug. This is precisely what had happened to Vaidik's tale, until Congress, for reasons that continue to defy political sense, decided that it was something they could beat the government with. It is possible that Congress, still unbalanced after the heaviest defeat in its history, has not been able to find its thinking cap. But to imagine that it could launch a credible attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over terrorism only means that the party is still skewed. No contemporary leader has better credentials than Modi in our ongoing national war against terrorists. His record, as well his oft-declared convictions, speak for themselves.

It is strange that Congress did not even bother to check the names of Vaidik's companions on this Pakistan tour. It would have discovered its own stalwarts, like Salman Khurshid and Mani Shankar Aiyar, along with fellow-travellers who have received grace-and-favour appoint-

ments in Congress regimes because of their relentless criticism of Modi. It says something about the plight of the party that a free kick turned into a self-goal. One of the depressing aspects of Dr. Manmohan Singh and Mrs. Sonia Gandhi's decade in power is that they handed virtual control of Indo-Pak relations to busybodies operating under high-falutin masquerades such as Track 2 and Track 3. In the competitive shouting match between peaceniks, Track 1 disappeared. This suited Islamabad brilliantly, for it could sustain the fiction of a relationship without having to answer hard questions about terrorism, particularly after the Mumbai attack mentored and managed by Hafiz Saeed and his allies in the Pak army and its intelligence services. Delhi became a willing party to a game where national interest was parlayed into a minstrel show.

Pakistan was able, in such a simulated atmosphere, to put forward a face it wanted to show, confident that none of the goodwill missionaries was interested in the second, more pernicious, face of the Islamabad establishment. Worse, such interlocutors missed -- deliberately or unconsciously -- the great changes that were taking place among the social forces in Pakistan. Hafiz Saeed cannot be



touched in Pakistan not merely because he is protected by the government. His true strength lies in the support he receives from an increasingly radicalised Sunni population that is dragging Pakistan, step by violent step, towards anarchy in the name of religion. India is but one of the targets. Pakistan has turned into a graveyard for Shias as these self-proclaimed jihadists turn their weapons on anyone who does not fit their version of faith. The irony of course is that the father of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, was a Shia, but don't whisper that too loudly these days. They will begin to shoot up Jinnah's portraits next.

A shallow approach to a complex problem has driven India's relations with Pakistan to a cul-de-sac, and no one quite knows where to go next. A low intensity war continues on our borders, even as the likes of Hafiz Saeed continue to plan another conflagration within India. What is certain is that Delhi and Islamabad must stop this pretence and grapple with harsh facts. Pseudo-diplomacy and fantasy-peddling have done enough damage.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Shooting down of MH17 is a war crime

We are deeply shocked and saddened by the tragic death of 298 people including 80 children who were on board a Malaysia airlines flight MH17 from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, which was so cruelly shot down by a surface-to-air missile in eastern Ukraine. Investigations are on to find out the culprits who committed the heinous crime.

As I was witnessing the painful visual report on internet, I was thinking if the Malaysia Airlines flight MH370, which disappeared on 8 March 2014 carrying 227 passengers plus 12 crews, had the same fate. However, the culprits behind the MH17 crash have managed to hide the evidences. Otherwise, where have those gone? No trace has been found yet even after so vigorous search!

I strongly feel that toughest international action should be taken against the countries or groups involved in killing innocent people by attacking a commercial plane in the name of war or internal conflict. Undoubtedly, such acts are no less than war crimes.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka

Israel's shameful war in Gaza

Israel's stubborn, cruel and selfish refusal to stop the brutal attack on Gaza is very shameful. For a few square miles of territory, Israel is determined to plunge the world into war!

As I heard, the wishful thinkers, false peace prophets and the naive optimists around the world are speaking of their hopes of peace. This Palestinian - Israeli peace accord reminds me of the verse, "They cry peace, peace where there is no peace". The Palestinians are just trying to take back their own homeland, which has been stolen by the Israelis. Selfishness doesn't lead to prosperity either for individuals or nations.

Ted Rudow III, MA
Palo Alto, CA, USA

Comments on commentary, "A job well done," published on July 18, 2014

Akhtar Shah

Credit where credit is due. The key to this success was hiring right people for the right job. This should apply to all projects and missions that have long term implications for the nation.

Those laughable sycophantic noises will always be there, as we all know. It's their 'stock' in trade! Here the quality of 'expertise' is sadly missing. They are mostly circumstantial high-ups. It's good news for BD and that must be recognised and credit attributable to good work has to be recognised. Worth reminding ourselves, that's exactly what they have been "voted in" to do.

Molla A. Latif

Bravo, editor, for his nice piece of commentary.

SM

Both leaders only care about grabbing power and staying in power.

"Take a car, turn a blind eye" (July 17, 2014)

Akhtar Hossain

Awesome piece of journalism. Sufferings of the people know no bounds when these ministers indulge in such luxury. When will this ever end? The Daily Star is doing a great job. I wish other newspapers would take a queue and expose the misuse of power in this manner.

Dr. Ahsan Habib

I hope Sheikh Hasina reads it. Thank you, The Daily Star, for publishing this and other investigative reports.

PlainSpeaker

Is she also not a beneficiary of this corruption? How much extra privileges her own people take from different public offices? What difference would it make, Dr. Habib, if you even personally read the report to her?

Andre

Excellent work exposing these vices!

Molla A. Latif

Traffic jam could be reduced at least 25% if this illegal use of cars was stopped. Even the ex-wives of these corrupt officials and ministers might be using those cars at the cost of public money.

Nasim Pear

I would rather be surprised if there were no corruption in LGED.

M JZ

It has nowadays become a fashion for government officials to use luxury cars having flag stands. If peons and orderlies can become millionaires overnight due to their connection with high-ups, then it is obvious that a person like Atiar Rahman of LGED will have the audacity to take two cars from projects for his present and divorced wives. The government should immediately ban use of flag stands in cars that are not used by cabinet members. Stern punitive measures should be taken against all offenders.

Mofi

Very shocking that even an accountant uses a car!

Mohammad Rahman

They do not have the basic instinct of shame as a human being. The LGED minister should be held accountable for such corruption in his ministry.