

Enforced disappearances on rise

Public security in question

THE rising trend of the incidence of enforced disappearances has come as a rude reawakening for common citizens. That is more so because going by the versions of the victims' relatives, apparently members of different law-enforcement agencies allegedly 'picked up' those persons. Disturbingly, the police, when approached by victims' relatives, are often found unresponsive to their concerns.

A human rights body, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), reports that some 74 people have been the victims of such disappearance in the first six months of this year alone. Of those, 16 could be traced, while bodies of 23 have been found. It gives one the jitters, especially, when one compares the current spate of such incidents with the average figures of the past five years.

However much the home minister may deny that these were cases of 'enforced disappearance,' or resort to semantics to call them 'abductions,' he owes it to the public to explain why those are happening in the first place. Even if those are cases of 'abduction', then the responsibility still falls squarely on the shoulders of the police to rescue the victims as well as to arrest the perpetrators.

We believe it is the state's responsibility to provide safety and security to its citizens rather than be in a denial mode virtually giving indulgence to possible abuse of power by those who are supposed to protect citizens.

Repair flood embankments

Essential survival kits needed

EARLY a third of the country is now inundated with water levels rising on all major rivers including the Jamuna, Padma, Teesta, Ghagot, Dharla and Arial Khan. These high tides are stripping away at flood protection embankments and spilling over to cause major havoc on infrastructure and agriculture. Though the government has mobilised food supplies and cash handouts, catering to the needs of some 900,000 people in the 19 affected districts will require much greater efforts. We understand that the flooding will probably hit the low lying areas capital city within the coming days and that poses a headache of its own.

We are thankful that there have no reported cases of death, but the fact remains that the current wave of flooding will be here for some time. It has put a massive strain on resource mobilisation at both local and central levels. What has become evident is that cracks and collapse of a major flood control embankment in Bogra precipitated Jamuna spilling over into a number of upazillas. This incident merely highlights all the more the need to work round the clock to reinforce embankments wherever needed so as to avoid further marooning of people so far not affected by floods.

Entire communities have seen their property and livelihoods washed away. These unfortunate people are now marooned in isolated areas facing critical shortage of essential items like food, safe drinking water and medication. The thrust of activities must focus on their survival and containing the outbreak of diseases that come inevitably when floodwaters recede.

Amend Bangladesh Atomic Energy Regulatory Act 2012

ABDUL MATIN

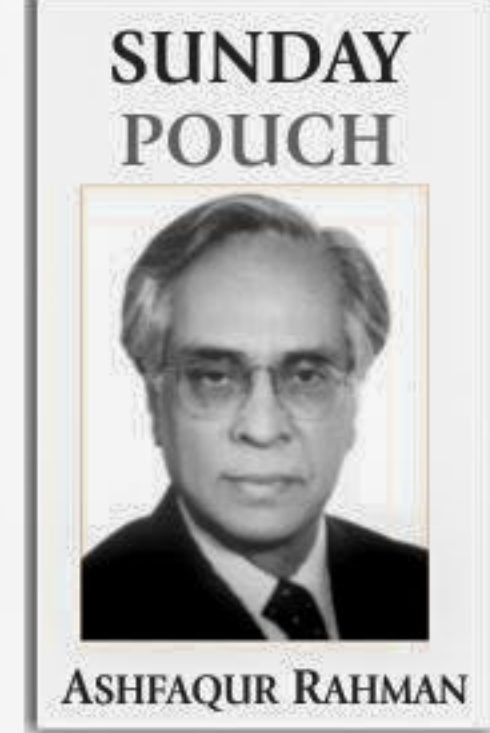
BDANGLADESH is going ahead with the construction of a 2000 MWe nuclear power plant at Rooppur with Russian assistance. In doing so, the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Regulatory Authority (BAERA) was formed in 2013 following the enactment of the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Regulatory Act 2012. The BAERA has the primary responsibility of ensuring the health and safety of the general public and the plant workers against any harmful effects arising from peaceful uses of nuclear energy. In order to carry out this responsibility, the authority needs to (i) establish regulatory standards, codes and criteria, (ii) review and evaluate the safety analysis and environmental reports (iii) issue licences and (iv) inspect the licensee's facility to ensure that the design, manufacture, installation and operation conform to specified rules and regulations.

It is important that the authority is staffed by highly qualified and experienced professionals. A guidebook of the International Energy Agency (IAEA) entitled "Manpower Development for Nuclear Power" (Technical Reports Series No. 200) clearly specifies the required qualifications and experience of the head of the authority and its directors and other professionals. According to this guidebook, the head (chairman) should have an "MS in nuclear engineering" with experience of "Min. 15 years in progressively responsible positions in power plant engineering, including 5 years in nuclear power, preferably safety-oriented activities..." and specialized training of "1 -2 years nuclear safety regulations, orientation in foreign regulations and other international codes of practice, safety guides, etc..." The directors of different divisions (equivalent to members) should have MS in engineering (mechanical, civil, electrical or nuclear) with experience of 10-12 years in the specified fields. The organization will have about 55 professionals, 80% of whom shall have MS in electrical, mechanical, civil or nuclear engineering. Unfortunately, while drafting the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Regulatory Act 2012, the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission ignored the IAEA guidelines and manipulated the qualifications and experience of the chairman, members and other professionals of BAERA- jeopardizing the concept of the formation of the authority.

Consequently, a floodgate has been opened for appointment of incompetent people without any knowledge of nuclear engineering or safety of nuclear reactors as chairman, members and other professionals of BAERA. This undermines the importance of the authority and puts the safety of our nuclear reactors at great risk. Moreover, to make BAERA fully autonomous and independent, it should be made accountable to a special parliamentary committee on nuclear safety. It is, therefore essential that we amend the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Regulatory Act 2012 to modify the qualifications and experience as per IAEA guidelines and make BAERA accountable to a special parliamentary committee.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

China fiddles: While Xinjiang burns



major ethnic groups residing there- the Han Chinese and the Muslim Uyghurs. The Chinese claim that Xinjiang was a part of China since 60 B.C. However only in the last century did it become Chinese-speaking.

The province possesses some of China's largest natural gas and oil reserves. 'It is strategically situated as a distributor of these resources to energy hungry Central Asia and surrounding Chinese provinces.' Relations between the two ethnic groups have been tense over the years. The Chinese government is keen to pacify ethnic tensions given its geo-economic position. The present Chinese President Xi Jinping is taking deep interest in controlling violence and ethnic clashes. He has instituted Communist party control and oversight of the Chinese security apparatus, with a much reduced role of Central politics and Law commission. However in spite of this shift, the Government response has been swinging between soft and hard policies. The soft approach is characterized by the activities of the Chinese Islamic Association, which focuses in maintaining and upkeep of mosques. There are about 20,000 mosques today in Xinjiang. The hard approach is to increase the presence of the security apparatus as well as reeducate and reform religious leaders. The Chinese government is keen to see that 'radicalization' of religion do not take hold and they are not able to forge connections between themselves and the remaining 21 million Muslims now inhabiting other parts of China.

China is also apprehensive that the recent violence perpetrated by Muslim Uyghur extremists are not in any way influenced by outsiders from Pakistan, Turkey and even Syria. This leads to China sidestepping the main cause of ethnic tension and flip-flopping over the ever increasing violence in Xinjiang and the repression that is going on.

Now what is the root cause of ethnic tensions between the Han Chinese and Uyghur Muslims? Presently Chinese state policies tend to limit religious practices there. Government employees are 'forbidden' to wear Islamic scarves and coverings. Even Muslim men are not allowed to wear their traditional caps. Muslims are not allowed to fast during Ramadan. Young people below the age of 18 are not allowed to enter mosques. It is reported that the Holy Quran is allowed to be read in fixed Government

schools. There can be no teaching of the Quran in private.

But there are other serious reasons behind ethnic tension in Xinjiang. There exists a deep socio economic disparity between the two ethnic groups. A Han is paid a much higher salary than a Uyghur for the same job. So the Han occupy most of the high paying occupations which also commands higher status. This unequal access to the labor market creates disparity in determining residential locations too. So there is hardly any attempt at economic and political integration. So each day new reasons for ethnic tensions are created.

Such disparities and tensions have created space for what is known as 'East Turkestan Independence Movement' (ETIM). It advocates for an independent, self governing East Turkestan, in the autonomous region of Xinjiang in China. Since the Uyghurs are being forced to assimilate to a Han Chinese way of life, they are increasingly threatened by the spread of Han Chinese culture in Xinjiang. School instruction is now in Mandarin (Han Chinese language). At the same time, millions of Han Chinese have been allowed to settle in Xinjiang. Because of this, the Uyghurs are resisting and propagating the creation of a separate East Turkestan entity.

There are of course strong arguments against East Turkestan independence. China has a historic claim on modern day Xinjiang for two thousand years. The Uyghur people came into Xinjiang after the collapse of the Orkon Uyghur kingdom based in modern day Mongolia around 842 A.D. So China suspects that the independence movement is secretly supported and funded by outside powers who wish to weaken China.

It may be pointed out that the historical native land of the Uyghurs is not the whole of Xinjiang but only the Tarim Basin. The capital of Xinjiang , Urumqi, is also not Uyghur but originally belonged to the Han and the Hui (another Muslim group).It is also not true that only 5 % of the population of Xinjiang in 1949 was Han and the rest 95 % was Uyghur. In fact, they forget about the presence of the Mongols, Kazakhs, Uzbek, Manchu and the Hui people in Xinjiang.

Keeping the above facts in mind, the Uyghur dilemma which has led to a political impasse needs to be resolved by addressing its real causes. The Chinese government need to open up the spaces in which the culture and religious conviction of Uyghurs could be expressed. As Beijing closes the spaces and reverts to oppression of Uyghurs it has allowed the power of Uyghur nationalism to grow. Each day violence and mayhem is increasing in frequency. They must instead be encouraged to think about self government under Chinese sovereignty. The fires need to be doused and the Chinese Government must start dialogue with the Uyghurs and find out ways for peaceful co-existence. Here the Islamic world must come forward to assist China in her effort.

The writer is a former Ambassador and a commentator on current issues.

The silence of the BRICS

JASWANT SINGH

THE world, it seems, is in the grip of geopolitical anomie. No leader, group of leaders, or institution commands sufficient authority to restore any semblance of international order and peace. For many, this global rudderlessness recalls Europe's sleepwalk into catastrophe 100 years ago.

There are certainly some uncanny similarities between current events and that fateful time. The downing in eastern Ukraine of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 echoed the 1914 assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in its recklessness, not to mention the failure of governments and citizens to recognize that diplomatic rivalry can quickly give way to violence.

Indeed, even after Russia's annexation of Crimea and incitement of secessionist movements in eastern Ukraine, airlines did not consider it necessary to reroute flights. This reflected the international community's response – or lack thereof – to the menacing developments. With Russian forces now directly participating in the unrest in eastern Ukraine, the match lit by President Vladimir Putin could spark a conflagration.

Shortly before the Soviet Union's dissolution was complete, I asked Zbigniew Brzezinski, who served as National Security Adviser under US President Jimmy Carter, what the world should expect from a post-Soviet Russia. He replied that the Soviet Union's dissolution would bring about a new era of global peace, if – and only if – Russia remained within its geographical boundaries.

That is a path in which Putin clearly has no interest, as he leads Russia's latest crusade, after its 2008 war with Georgia, to recover a part of its lost empire. The "history" that, according to Francis Fukuyama, was supposed to have ended with communism's collapse has gotten a second wind. In Putin's authoritarian capitalism – similar to that of China – Western-style liberal democracy, which was supposed to reign triumphant, has a new rival.

From Putin's perspective, Russia's focus on Ukraine makes sense. Ukraine's allegiance is essential to Putin's effort to establish his Russian-led Eurasian Union as an alternative to the European Union. Moreover, Russian leaders have always viewed Ukraine as an important security buffer; it is also a transit route for the energy exports on which Russia's economy depends.

This is not the first time that Putin has worried about a Ukrainian shift toward the West. During Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution, Putin believed that the CIA was behind the widespread protests that blocked Viktor Yanukovich's attempt to steal the presidential election. But the scale of the protests, together with the West's support for the protesters, compelled Putin to refrain from intervening directly. Instead of launching a military campaign – overt or otherwise – he used energy exports and financial incentives to keep Ukraine's government in line.

This time around, Putin chose military intervention –

a decision that has proved devastating for Russia. Western sanctions have fueled capital flight on a scale not seen since the early years of the country's post-communist transition.

Moreover, the central bank's decision not to defend a sharply falling ruble, together with Putin's prohibition of Western food imports, will lead to a sharp decline in living standards and a growing sense of global isolation. As a result, support for Putin is likely to wane.

The fighting in eastern Ukraine now resembles a gang war, lawless and unconstrained. And the EU refrained for too long from taking decisive action that would undermine the economic interests of influential members like France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Just before the EU finally tightened its sanctions at the end of July, Marietje Schaake, a Dutch MEP, observed that almost every European country had "voluntarily handed over power to Mr. Putin, allowing him to play countries against each other." Thus, in the wake of the downing of MH17, US President Barack Obama, as Geoff Dyer put it, was "caught between a strategy of trying to move in tandem with Europe and the clamor for a decisive US response."

If the West's response to the crisis in Ukraine has been weak and misguided, the reaction of the world's rising powers has been one of willful blindness. China, for example, has effectively endorsed Russia's annexation of Crimea and intervention in eastern Ukraine. That should have set off alarms bells in India, given China's claims on large swathes of Indian sovereign territory, but there is no sign yet that anyone has noticed.

Considering India's history, this is not altogether shocking. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, India did not express explicit

disapproval. Indeed, India repeatedly abstained from United Nations resolutions urging the withdrawal of Soviet forces – resolutions that had overwhelming support among the other non-aligned countries.

By the late 1980s, when the Soviet Union sought an honorable and safe exit from Afghanistan, India had forfeited the standing necessary to help. Once the Soviets withdrew, India could not play any serious role in shaping Afghanistan's future.

When the foundations of the global order are threatened, great powers must not adopt a policy of inaction and silence. For their part, emerging powers like India, Brazil, South Africa, and Turkey must, at the very least, loudly and categorically defend the fundamental rules of the international system that has enabled them to grow and prosper. Otherwise, when world leaders finally do wake up and take action, they could find that they have stumbled into yet another global catastrophe.

The writer is a former Indian finance minister, foreign minister, and defense minister, is the author of Jinnah: India – Partition – Independence and India At Risk: Mistakes, Misconceptions And Misadventures Of Security Policy.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Preparedness against Ebola threat

We should be in every way possible alert to Ebola threat and be prepared to prevent it. People should be made aware of the symptoms of Ebola infection so that they can take cautionary steps. The declaration of surveillance is one of the good steps taken by the government to prevent the deadly Ebola virus. Our medical teams will monitor international airports in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet as well as the Chittagong Seaport. Apart from that, mass awareness through campaigns in the media can be effective as well.

Nusrat Gulzar
University of Dhaka

Ban rickshaws on Rokeya Sharani

As a resident of Pallabi area, I frequently use Rokeya Sharani to go to the centre of the city. From early morning till midnight the road remains busy. The limited road space can not accommodate hundreds of buses and private cars which ply regularly through this road. Plus a large number of rickshaws use this road creating severe traffic jam.

Nowadays rickshaw is no cheap transport. It is time consuming. Worse still, most rickshaw-pullers defy traffic rules. Rickshaws should be banned from Rokeya Sharani to reduce the traffic jam. Thus will help office-goers and students to reach their destination on time.

Nazakat
On e-mail

Why a third class is barrier to bank jobs?

It is a matter of sorrow for the job seekers that banks and other financial institutions don't allow candidates having one third division to compete for job exams, even if they have two first divisions. Students of lower and middle class backgrounds have to complete their education amid various difficulties. Out of bad luck one may get a third class, but that doesn't mean one is not capable of competing in the job market.

We earnestly request the governor of Bangladesh Bank to consider the case so that job seekers having one third division can get the chance to apply in all banks and financial institutions.

Badsha Alomgir
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Newborn stolen from DMCH rescued in Gazipur," published on August 28, 2014

Litan Chandra Roy
RAB has done a very good job.

Mayen Uddin Tazim
Thanks to the High Court for giving instruction for conducting a judicial inquiry. We also thank the RAB officials, who arrested the culprits. It is being suspected that some vested groups at DMCH may be involved in that incident.

Rest in Peace
Thank God, the baby has been rescued.

Baz
I am a serving police officer in London and truly believe the police/law-enforcers of Bangladesh are as good as any other in the world; they just need to be given the chance to do their job without interference. Well done, Rab, for reuniting the baby with its mother!

"Indicting opposition men en masse" (August 27, 2014)

Molla A. Latif
The institutions like the police and the judiciary should not be used against the democratic rights of the opposition. And we believe, these institutions should also have the courage not to yield in the face of pressure to involve them in such activities.

"NBR tightens rules for rent payment" (August 27, 2014)

Dulal
Good initiative. But will this effort be fruitful?