

Eviction from railway land

Give it a human face

We agree that railway lands must be freed of illegal grabbers and encroachment. And no one can take issue with the authorities for taking actions to ensure the safety of the railway tracks and the safety of the railway passengers. But we certainly take issue with the method of the drive which commenced recently to free railway lands. It is, to say the least, highhanded and most inhuman. We feel that the slum dwellers as well as the many traders along the track should have been warned well before launching such a wide scale eviction drive.

We ask why is it that it took the lives of four people for the authorities to wake up to the problem. It is as if the illegal structures have come up only recently. The vegetable vendors have been carrying out their business along the railway tracks for God only knows how long! And this was a means of livelihood of so many poor people. Are we to believe that the railway police and other agencies were not aware of the slums that have been allowed to grow in exchange of rent?

While we believe that such drives are necessary we would want the authorities to go into the heart of the problem. A host of characters are involved in the whole business of minting money by renting out railway land. They have not been arrested, and perhaps never will be. There is a nexus of these people with the police, railway authorities and those that can provide them the guarantee of impunity. And this link must not only be severed, all those who are linked with it, including the public servants, must be made examples of.

Jaywalking across flyovers!

Penalise such dangerous habits

If one has viewed our yesterday's photo series of jaywalking by pedestrians along the Gুলিস্তান-Jatrabari flyover near Tikatuli then one must have had a chill running through one's spine.

The photos showed cluster of pedestrians risking their lives while scaling over and slipping through the divider along the flyover. This kind of crossing is not only unlawful but also dangerous as one is likely get hit by a wheezing vehicle any minute. In case of a flyover, a fast travelling vehicle is a common scene and it is difficult for it to slow down due to the sheer force of inertia. In fact, the photo series also exposes the widely prevailing mentality to take short-cuts where value of life is overtaken by the value of time. By a demonstration effect, it also encourages jaywalking in general across other busy roads.

Against the backdrop of such habitual recourse to short-cut to the extent of avoiding footbridges or underpasses, we stress the need for introducing stricter rules for stopping the hazardous trait of jaywalking. Using billboards and hoardings beside the roads to highlight the dangers of and punishments for jay walking is strongly suggested. Those who risk their lives for crossing roads illegally should be penalised by patrolling teams. Moreover, massive awareness building campaigns should be carried out against reckless movement along roads.

Who should blink first: Nawaz Sharif or Imran Khan?

THE deadly floods sweeping through Kashmir in both India and Pakistan have brought the two hostile neighbours closer together. In a gesture of goodwill, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has written to his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif offering assistance in the relief efforts for the victims of the unprecedented floods. But will the calamity bring Sharif's adversaries at home closer to him?

Imran Khan, a cricketer-turned politician, and Tahirul-ul-Qadri, a cleric, started a protest march in August to oust Nawaz Sharif's government over allegations of massive rigging of the 2013 general election even though both local and foreign observers considered the election to be reasonably fair. After a month-long demonstration, the number of protesters has dwindled from thousands to hundreds but the confrontation is continuing. Recently, Imran Khan told his supporters, "I think it's a battle of nerves. It's a matter of who buckles under the pressure first."

Nawaz Sharif met with army Chief General Raheel Sharif in a bid to diffuse the crisis. It was believed that the general would play the role of a mediator. There were also speculations that the army would step in. Seven protesters were killed and over 300 injured when police intervened. In order to strengthen his position, Nawaz Sharif called a joint session of the parliament and got the full backing of the lawmakers. Apparently, the army has taken a back seat now and is engaged in relief operations.

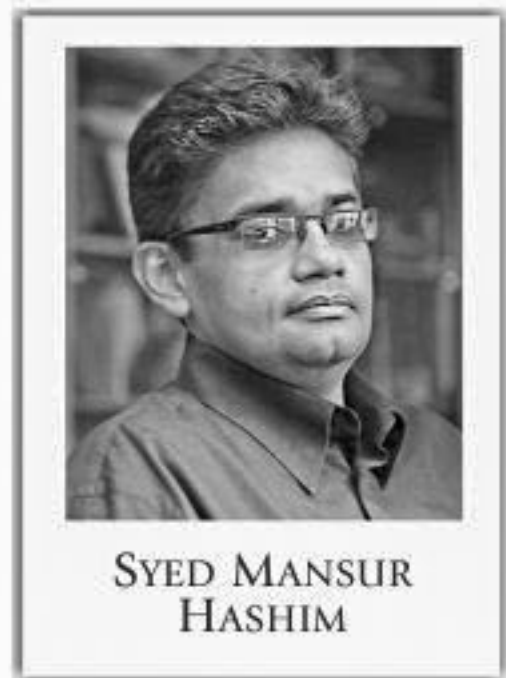
There are allegations of collusion between Imran Khan and the army. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto colluded with the army before the war of independence in 1971. Luckily for us, it resulted in the creation of Bangladesh. Though Bhutto became the president and later prime minister of the remainder of Pakistan, he could not survive for long. He was ousted by General Ziaul Huq in 1977 and hanged two years later. Even his daughter and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated when General Pervez Musharraf was the president of Pakistan. Now he faces charges for the murder of Benazir Bhutto.

If he takes lessons from history, Imran Khan will be wise not to be a tool in the hands of the army. He cannot forcefully oust a duly elected government in a parliamentary democracy. If he does, he will likewise be ousted in no time if he ever comes to power. Instead, he should try to strengthen the fragile democracy in Pakistan and wait patiently for the next election..

No, it is not a battle of the nerves. It is a matter of survival of democracy. It is, therefore, time for Imran Khan to blink first.

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

Not only fossil fuels



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

IT is little surprise that Japan is reversing its policy on nuclear power generation. Following the Fukushima disaster, the country had decided to take its nuclear industry offline to a great extent to perform (a) safety checks, and (b) to look at alternative sources for generating power. That experiment led to a romance with "renewables" and fossil-fuel. But the prohibitive costs associated with generating power from renewable energy including geothermal to solar has proved uneconomical. That end users, viz. consumer were having to foot bills anywhere between 10-15% over and above what power cost prior to shutdown of Japan's nuclear industry has led to a general rethinking by Japanese policymakers. The other matter that came into consideration for this major change in policy was that the country was spending an additional US\$40billion or so to import fossil fuels, not to mention the increased pollution.

Japan is not the only country that has rethought its nuclear options. Other major power users across the world are going for nuclear power coupled with renewable energy sources to combat greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. According to the World Meteorological Organisation's (WMO) September bulletin, "the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere reached a new record high in 2013, propelled by a surge in levels of carbon dioxide." WMO's data is supported by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) 'Annual Greenhouse Gas Index' that state that carbon dioxide levels accounted for 80% of all GHG and 34% of the increase in 'radiative forcing' (which causes warming of the climate). Fossil-fuel based power such as coal and oil-fired power plants emit enormous amounts of carbon dioxide (CO2). The Peoples' Republic of China has been experiencing the ill-effects of over reliance on coal-driven power plants and is also on a trajectory to large-scale nuclear power. It built its first energy reactor in 1985. Presently there are 14 nuclear reactors in operation, with another 27 under construction.

Matters become clearer when we look at Saudi Arabia, a country with enormous fossil fuel reserves has decided to go "nuclear". The kingdom hopes to generate 15% of its energy needs within the next 20 years. That translates into 18,000 megawatts (MW) of new power, all coming from 12 nuclear plants that will cost about \$80billion. Saudi Arabia intends to invest three times that much (\$240bn) into solar technology that will cut production costs by 50%. So, why are Saudis of all people investing so heavily in nuclear power and costly solar technology? According to Gulf Research Center, energy consumption stands at more than 200 billion kilowatt hours (kWhs) that translates into approximately 6,000 kWhs per person. With half of this amount being used for residential purposes and given the rate of urbanisation and population growth, the realisation is that those massive oil supplies will not last indefinitely. Saudi Arabia utilises nearly a billion barrels of oil per annum to produce its electricity needs. When one factors in the oil needed to operate plants to desalinate sea water, one can understand why policymakers in the country are headed towards nuclear energy. With an excess of 0.5million sandy areas where the sun is not a problem, Saudi Arabia can afford to pour in billions into photovoltaic and solar technologies. And it is not only the Saudis who are going nuclear.

CO2 being one of the prime suspects for rise in GHG, being responsible for approximately 84% of the increase in radiative forcing over the past decade and 83% over the past five years, there are reasons to be concerned. WMO's Secretary-General Michel Jarraud states "we know without any doubt that our climate is changing and our weather is becoming more extreme due to human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels. The Greenhouse Gas Bulletin shows that, far from falling, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere actually increased last year at the fastest rate for nearly 30 years. We must reverse this trend by cutting emissions of CO2 and other greenhouse gases across the board. We are running out of time".

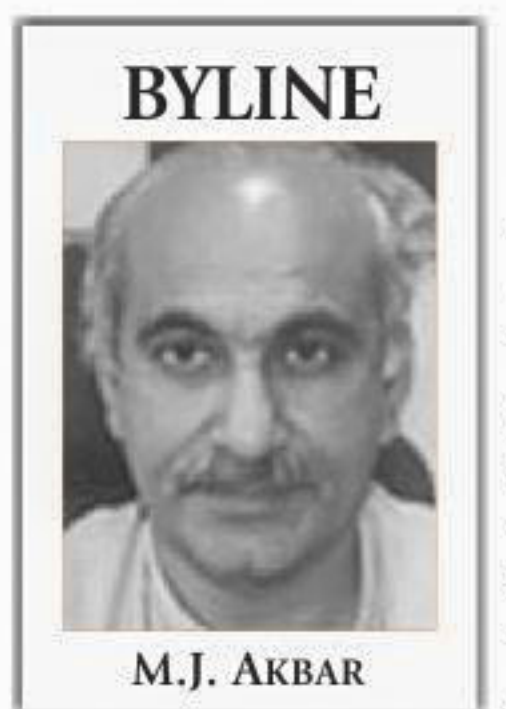
Whilst resource rich countries in the Mid-East and Asian economic giants like Japan and China can afford to make investments worth hundreds of billions of dollars in nuclear and solar technology, Bangladesh, unfortunately cannot. With the fast depletion of our natural gas reserves, the country is headed towards coal-fired power plants. Every industrialised country in the world has gone down this path and Bangladesh has no other choice. What can be done, however, is to choose wisely on the technology to produce electricity from coal. Therein lies the challenge. A failure to do so would result in disaster for the environment. The nuclear option has just been launched through a state-to-state contract with Russia for two power plants and it provides an alternative to mono sourcing of primary energy. Environmentalists in the country have for some years been advocating for the scrapping of both these technologies. Given the experience of Japan in recent times over the prohibitive costs of electricity produced from solar technology, the sad reality is that mass produced and affordable clean technologies are still some years off.

We need to try out all possible options for developing a sustainable energy base. Presently, talks are ongoing for developing of a balanced mix for nuclear, coal, gas and import oil-based power but little has been done to reduce dependency on import oil based costly power generation. The master plan envisaged coal to supply 50% of total power within 2030 but in real terms, no real progress has been made (except only the recent contract on 1,200 MW Matarbari import coal based power plant initiative with Japanese assistance). Policymakers have their work cut out. The time for dilly dallying on future energy supplies is long gone and tough decisions on coal need to be made today, not tomorrow.

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The Union Jack, and perhaps Jill



M.J. AKBAR

FOR an Indian who has always believed that the partition of India was a deep, self-inflicted wound carved by a British knife, the thought that Britain might split into two nations on 18 September is not without some satisfaction. History is rarely synonymous with justice, but when the echo of some form of retribution fills the air, we might sit back and enjoy the music.

On 18 September Scotland will vote on whether to continue the three-century old union with England. Where on earth did this referendum emerge from? A smug region of collective psychology called Never-Never-Land. The British cross-party establishment was happy to concede a referendum to Scottish nationalists because it was totally convinced that Scots would reject separation. The possibility seemed too bizarre in a city like London, where the colourful frolics of its mayor, Boris Johnson, was always far more interesting than conversation in the pubs of Glasgow. Till a week ago, the Prime Minister of Britain David Cameron was not even bothered enough to campaign seriously. A conservative magazine like Spectator [once edited by Johnson], published views in mid-August from respected columnists saying "Only a 'Sod off Scotland' letter signed by English celebrities can now persuade Scottish waverers to vote 'Yes' [to independent Scotland]". More jovial Englishmen noted, haw haw haw, that you couldn't be a real country until you had your own beer and your own airline. The Scots like Scotch; and, being great believers in fiscal prudence, understood long before that one-man nation called Vijay Mallya discovered to his eternal horror that an airline is a flight towards doom.

And then suddenly an opinion poll last weekend jolted England with news that Scottish nationalists, who had been trailing by 20 percentage points a month before, were in the lead for the first time and undecided voters were flocking in its direction by a two-to-one margin. London has probably never been so startled since Lord Cornwallis returned from the American colonies with news that some upstart called George Washington had won the war. A pithy argument became the great persuader: Scotland was not leaving England, it was joining the world.

There is no certainty that a majority of Scots will vote for separation on the 18th. But we can be sure about one thing: the margin will be narrow, and Great Britain, if it survives, will become a geographical rather than a political union. The arguments for unity have become, essentially, municipal in nature; whether urban drains and rural pastures will be slightly better managed. Scotland has always had its own football team. The fact that it has never been as good as the English team, or that a Great British side might have outperformed both, has never persuaded the Scots to abandon their right to a popular sports identity. Football represents ancestry that cannot be extinguished by modern power arrangements. Irrespective of the actual vote, this referendum may have revived a spirit that is not purchasable through a currency called the pound.

The pro-Britain lobby might be heartbroken if it fails, but it could yet discover that victory, if it comes, has been purchased at a price that Britain will not be long able to bear. Enough Scots are now convinced that they can create a society of five million people that will be culturally secure, and economically caring. At the very least, London will have to ensure that both are possible in a united kingdom. Who will pick up the tab for such a Scotland? The English, since they insisted on keeping Scotland under a single flag.

What odds then, that on 18 September 2024, Britain will hold a referendum in England for English independence? Don't dismiss the thought. More amazing things have happened in the weave and waft of nations. The marriage between England and Scotland is over. If divorce proceedings fail, then it is only because one partner is offering economic terms that are unsustainable in the long, or perhaps even the medium, run. Moreover, every divorce includes some sort of mess that you would rather not face.

Once upon a time this marriage worked because England and Scotland together had children both cared about, and, more pertinently, both benefited hugely from. They were called the colonies. India was the jewel child of the family. But that child has grown up, and gone its own way along with siblings. The children used to visit for a while; now they don't bother. Indians now prefer to visit an uncle called Sam, rather than a mummy called Elizabeth. The parents remain prosperous enough, but they do not have much to do with each other. Scotland, less burdened by sentiment, has been realistic enough to signal time-out, and then pushed for separation. England is dangling a new honeymoon, while threatening that there will never be any alimony. We shall see what happens, but the relationship is fundamentally dead. If they don't bury it now, they will a little later.

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

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Govt. should not take decisions alone

Recently the government has taken some measures regarding the issue of impeachment of SC judges and National Broadcast Policy without consulting the stakeholders. It also sacrificed Bangladesh's candidacy for the UNSC in the same way. Government should not take decisions alone, and more specifically, about certain matters that are crucial to the country's interest.

Accountability is important. In many countries all political parties unite on crucial matters. Our government will prove its wisdom and sensibility by listening to the other parties. They should admit their failures and limitations. They should accept the fact that they can also make mistakes and are not above criticism. So, suggestions from others should be welcome and given importance.

Cantara Wali
On e-mail

This useless controversy should end

The recently raised controversy over Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman's role during the Liberation War should be stopped. Rather, we should analyse their post-war roles as the heads of the state.

Because of the power struggle between the two parties, the helpless general people have become hostages. It is of no use to discuss whether AL is better than BNP or BNP is better than AL. We should rather discuss whether the commoners are provided with their rights or not. These controversies will not feed the hungry people of the country. So, what's the use of it?

Rubab Abdullah (Shukla)
USA

Dangers of antibiotics overuse in animal farming

Worldwide, antibiotics are being abused in animal farming in the name of boosting production of meat, eggs, farmed fish, etc. Overuse of antibiotics non-therapeutically is increasing antibiotic resistance among bacteria that cause human infections.

Consumers are pressing the companies involved in the production of animal agricultural products to completely eliminate the use of antibiotics in animal feeds for quick growth. However, it is encouraging to learn that Perdue Foods, America's third largest poultry producer has removed all antibiotics from its chicken hatcheries to address growing concerns about bacterial resistance to the widely used drugs.

In Bangladesh, antibiotics are widely used to fatten cattle. As the Eid-ul-Adha is nearing, cattle farmers are busy making their cattle healthy and fat by injecting antibiotics. But consumption of antibiotic-treated beef and poultry birds and their products can cause serious harm to human health. One of the major reasons behind growing resistance of bacteria against antibiotics is consumption of these animal agriculture products by humans.

Strict measures should be taken by authorities concerned to stop the abuse of antibiotics in animal agriculture. Different agricultural extension organisations should intensify extension activities to dissuade farmers from overusing or abusing antibiotics.

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

Comments on news report, "4 killed, 5 injured at Karwan Bazar," published on September 11, 2014

Dev Saha
Why on earth people have set up bazaar on rail lines?

Sayed Rahman
Who should I blame for this? It does not make sense how people build kitchen market on rail tracks! Maybe we will see a drive against it, and within a month from the drive, the market will be set up again.

"Old formalin in new bottle" (September 12, 2014)

Fakhrul Islam
With unrestricted use of chemicals, we will become a sick nation within a few years.

Saleh Md. Shahriar
Public health is in danger due to widespread use of formalin and other chemicals in food.

"Is this the kind of democracy BNP offers?" (September 11, 2014)

Genuine Musafeer
Shame on these people who at present and in the past demonstrated with these kinds of lethal weapons for whatever reasons, self defense or killing people. This culture penetrated into our society like cancer. Who will bell the cat? All birds are of the same flock!!